

A STUDY OF THE EXPECTATION VS EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT UK UNIVERSITIES

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This dissertation is my own original work and has not been submitted for any assessment or award at the University of Chester or any other university. All secondary sources are acknowledged.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

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RESEARCH ABSTRACT

The background of higher education has been changing over the past two decades. In 2009, the estimated number of students registered outside their country of citizenship was almost 3.7 million (OECD, 2011). The international activities of universities in the United Kingdom (UK) have increased dramatically in volume, scope and complexity over the last decade. In addition, the knowledge of risen tuition fees, university funding cuts and doubts of declining student numbers has all contributed to the change. Therefore, achieving a sustainable competitive advantage in the higher education sector is important and at the forefront of many universities. In response, an “action research” method is agreed primarily using an adapted SERVQUAL instrument to examine expectations and experience of service quality among a sample of postgraduate international students at four leading UK universities. Study into service quality in a higher educational environment is insufficient, and where studies have been undertaken, very little has been done among postgraduates. The research findings suggest that the instrument utilised is suitable in a postgraduate context, and the statements load on the adapted SERVQUAL dimensions of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985, 1988). In an attempt to improve service quality at UK universities and to add to the knowledge base, several recommendations are obtained, and some trend for future research is suggested.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	II
ABSTRACT	III
LIST OF TABLES	VII
LIST OF FIGURES	VIII
CHAPTER ONE	1
GENERALITIES OF THE STUDY	1
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Background of Research	1
1.2 The UK Higher Education Sector	2
1.3 Research Objectives and Questions	3
1.4 Justification of Research	3
1.5 Research Methodology	4
1.6 Research Limitations	5
1.7 Research Structure	6
1.8 Definition of Key Concepts	6
1.9 Keywords	7
CHAPTER TWO	8
LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.0 Quality Expectations in Higher Education	8
2.1 Internationalisation of UK Higher Education System	8
2.2 Nature of Higher Education Services	10
2.3 Defining the Customer of Higher Education	12
2.4 Service Quality in Higher Education	13
2.5 Forming Customer Quality Expectations	15
2.6 Quality in Higher Education and the Role of Tutors	19
2.7 Chapter Summary	20

CHAPTER THREE	22
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	22
3.0 Introduction	22
3.1 Methodological Viewpoint	22
3.2 Research Philosophy	22
3.3 Research Approach	27
3.4 Research Design	28
3.5 Research Sampling	30
3.6 Data Collection Method	31
3.7 Limitations	31
3.7.1 Reliability	31
3.7.2 Validity	32
3.8 Rejection Methods	32
3.9 Ethical Consideration	33
3.10 Summary	33
CHAPTER FOUR	35
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	35
4.0 Introduction	35
4.1 Analysis of Data	35
4.2 Findings	38
4.2.1 Findings of Service Quality	38
4.3 Expectations and Experience Gaps of 28 Statements	41
4.4 Expectations and Experience Gaps	42
4.4.1 Description of Dimension 1: Tangibles	44
4.4.2 Description of Dimension 2: Reliability	45
4.4.3 Description of Dimension 3: Responsiveness	47
4.4.4 Description of Dimension 4: Assurance	50
4.4.5 Description of Dimension 5: Empathy	53
4.4.6 Description of Dimension 6: Employability	55
CHAPTER FIVE	58
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	58

5.0	Introduction	58
5.1	Critical Evaluation of Methodology	58
5.2	Primary Data	58
5.3	Conceptual Model	59
5.4	Summary of Study	60
5.4.1	The Findings on the Objectives	60
5.4.2	The Findings of the six SERVQUAL Dimensions	61
5.5	Recommendations	65
5.6	Limitations	66
5.7	Recommendations for Future Study	66
5.8	Conclusion	66
MANAGEMENT RESEARCH PROJECT REFLECTION		68
BIBLIOGRAPHY		70
APPENDIX		84

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:	Analysis of gender	35
Table 2:	Analysis of level of study	36
Table 3:	Analysis of country of origin/nationalities	36
Table 4:	Analysis of mean score expectations and experience for 28 statements across six dimensions	38
Table 5:	Analysis of summary gaps score for the six dimensions	42

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1:	Gaps model of service quality	5
Figure 2:	The dimensions of quality	15
Figure 3:	The research onion	23
Figure 4:	Pie chart showing the % of participants based on gender	35
Figure 5:	Pie chart showing the % of participants based on the level of study	36
Figure 6:	Pie chart showing the % of participants based on their countries of origin	37
Figure 7:	Gap between service quality dimensions	43
Figure 8:	Tangibles statements	44
Figure 9:	Reliability statements	46
Figure 10:	Responsiveness statements	48
Figure 11:	Assurance statements	51
Figure 12:	Empathy statements	53
Figure 13:	Employability statements	55

CHAPTER ONE

GENERALITIES OF THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

This research is focusing on international students' quality expectations and experience in four UK higher education institutions and on the components that form these expectations from students standpoint. This chapter is a preface to the topic and it begins by understanding the background of the subject. In this part, a concise introduction is given and in addition, a brief literature review takes after the research questions and objectives of this study together with its limitations. The following chapter includes keywords and definitions of main concepts so as to avoid misunderstanding, as various definitions exist in the present literature. The research methodology is addressed briefly and the chapter ends with a short presentation of the research structure.

1.1 Background of Research

There has been a rapid interest in international tertiary education lately. According to Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006), higher education market is presently well established as a universal development and the competition for foreign students has increased. For many establishments, service quality becomes a channel to retain student numbers and to hold the market share (Yeo, 2008).

In current years, market-type techniques and marketisation policies have been presented in sectors that were once identified by a high degree of government regulation. In higher education, the earlier mentioned marketisation policies are invented to vitalise student choice and change markets in order to better the quality and range of educational services (Jongbloed, 2003). According to Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006), many universities are now moderately accepting marketing theories and ideas due to the changes in order to gain competitive edge and a larger share of the global market.

Durvasula, Lysonski and Madhavi (2011) maintain that marketing has become essential to higher education as universities differentiate their service offering and compete aggressively for students. The globalisation of higher education as also emphasised the

international competition in tertiary education. Higher education institutions now acknowledge the need to market themselves in a climate of international contest (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006).

According to Durvasula, Lysonski and Madhavi (2011), differentiating the service offering via quality management has become compulsory as the international contest for students increases. To create an effective marketing plan, higher institutions need to fully understand the expectations of students because it is an important part of service quality. Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990) argue that the most critical stage in delivering service quality is possibly knowing what customers expect. The purpose of this research is to examine the factors that affect international students' quality expectations in higher education.

1.2 The UK Higher Education Sector

United Kingdom is celebrated as one of the top provider of higher education housing some of the best universities in the world. Times Higher Education (2013 – 2014) reported that three of the top fifteen universities are based in the UK while the remaining twelve are of Switzerland and USA origin. Seven of the top ten universities in Europe are based in the UK and the remaining two are naturalised in Switzerland and Sweden.

On a local level, there are files showing the changes in higher education competitive market place. According to Department of Education (2011), 129 universities operated in the UK as of August 2011 when compared to the 2001 record of 109. This demonstrates a 15.5% increase over the last decade.

Key Note (2014) forecasts the number of students entering further education courses will fall over the next five years; but there will be a surge in the number of people applying for higher education courses notwithstanding the price. The most impressive value of the educational sector irrespective of the cost of service is that it will always be sought after.

Twenty years ago, there has been a massive change in the higher educational sector (Key Note, 2011). The educational sector has brought a lot of major reforms relating to social, political and economic factor due to its constant change.

Nonetheless, higher education is faced with pressure to build value in its activities (Heck, Johnsrud and Rosser, 2000). According to Tan and Kek (2004), the current principle for pushing value is to set out effort in on-going improvement while focusing on stakeholders' affair and also to raise students' satisfaction. Cheng (1990) said that quality education can be evaluated by students' satisfaction where the power to address strategic need is of great value. In addition, understanding student needs and expectations can lead to satisfaction by measuring the quality of education delivered.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

The primary objective of this research is to analyse the factors affecting international students' service quality expectations at four UK universities from the students' standpoint. According to Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990), rendering outstanding service requires the customer expectations to be known. In higher education, it is vital for the institutions to understand what the students think in terms of service quality in order to be successful in attracting new students and also for students' retention. The primary research objectives / questions are as follows:

- What are the expectations and experience of service quality of international students' at UK Universities?
- What is the gap between expectation and actual experience of international students' about quality of programmes delivered at UK Universities?
- How can this study provide recommendations for future development in order to attract and increase the satisfaction of international students' at the UK universities?

1.4 Justification of Research

Increasingly, "*Higher education institution is realising that higher education could be regarded as a business in the service sector*" (Rajkhowa and Raghav, 2013 pg.49). This can be interpreted, as meeting the demands of international student is very important.

This research justification is to provide recommendations on how international students' expectations and perception of programme delivery at UK universities can lead to more student satisfaction and retention. Students' expectation and their experience of a service play a big role in this research. According to HESA (2013), there has been a decrease in the student number for the past 3 years and also the recent changes in the mobility of international students, it is imperative to understand the expectations and perception of overseas students so as to affect positively the previous student numbers as reported by HESA. Also, education sector and its mode of delivery have changed rapidly due to technology and globalisation.

This has led to a big competition of foreign students among UK universities, which is part of the basis for this study, as this will recommend ways on how to improve service delivery at the Business School by taking into consideration some of the research recommendations suggested on completion of this study. Also, through suggestions made in this research, career and employability department can understand how to meet the demands of international students searching for part-time works, which on the long run can improve students experience and bring benefits to the university and the students at large.

This study will consolidate my knowledge and business insight regarding the understanding of people's expectations and perceptions of a service as it changes from time to time. Since most UK universities are showing interest in meeting the student demands, this research would assist them in gaining a competitive advantage in UK higher educational sector.

1.5 Research Methodology

The concentration is on service quality in higher education and also on subjects, such as student expectations and experience of educational institutions.

The experimental research is conducted by using a quantitative method and the data is collected via questionnaires. An adapted version of the SERVQUAL model will be used to measure the gaps in students' service quality expectations.

According to McElwee and Redman (1993), Soutar and McNeil (1996), Tan and Kek (2004), Yeo (2008), SERVQUAL model has been applied in examining service quality

in higher education. This study will concentrate only on the expected service and the student experience of service quality that measures the gap between the students' expectations and the experience of the service.

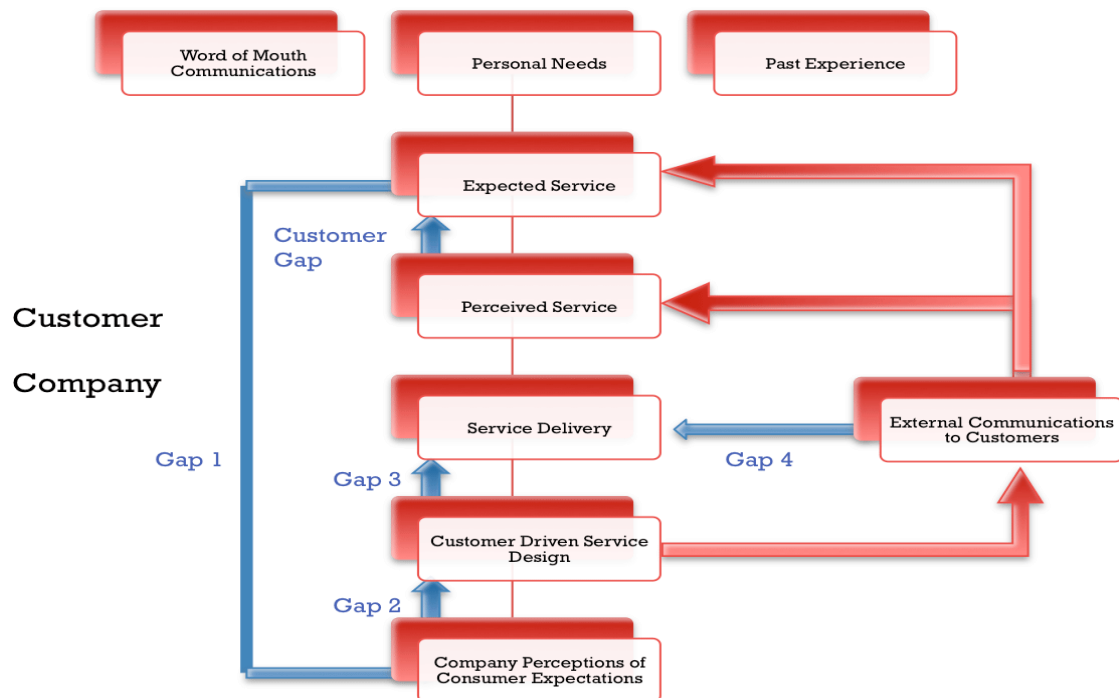


Figure 1: Gaps Model of Service Quality

Adapted from (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, Pg.44, 1985). Culled from (www.marketing101.co.uk).

1.6 Research Limitations

The limitations of this study are those dimensions of methodology or design that influenced the application or interpretation of the study results. They are the constraints on generalisability and quality of findings that are the result of the ways in which we chose to design the study and / or the method used to establish internal and external validity (<http://libguides.usc.edu/content.php?pid=83009&sid=616083>).

These are listed below:

- Students' response rate to questionnaire due to the summer break
- Questionnaire recovery time
- Limited SERVQUAL dimensions used
- Small population sample

- Unforeseen medical conditions

1.7 Research Structure

The Introductory part comprises of background to the research area, overview about UK higher education service quality, objective, scope and structure of study. The second part explores current literatures, focusing mainly on the nature of educational services, definition of the customer, service quality, formation of customer quality expectations and quality in education and the role of lecturers in the context of higher education. The third part details the study's methodology, which contains a justification of the research approach adopted, the data collection method and data analysis procedures, as well as ethical considerations. The fourth part includes both the findings and discussion into one brief chapter, which aims to present, analyse and talk through the results of the study in relation to the literature reviewed in section two. The fifth part give out conclusions and recommendations based on the findings and discussions drawn from section four, study limitations and a possibility of future research.

1.8 Definition of Key Concepts

Service is *“The production of an essentially intangible benefit, either in its own right or as a significant element of a tangible product, which through some form of exchange, satisfies an identified need.”* (Palmer, 2011 pg. 2).

Customer expectations are defined as *“predictions about what is likely to happen”* (Walker, 1995, pg. 6). They act as standards or reference points to which the reality is compared to (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1993).

Service quality is the variation between customers' expectations and judgements (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1990) and it can be defined as *“an attitude developed over all previous encounters with a service firm”* (Clow, Kurtz, Ozment and Ong, 1997, pg. 232).

International student is defined in this research as a student who is applying to an international degree programme.

Higher education can be defined as education at universities or similar educational institution, especially to degree level (Pearsall and Hanks, 2014).

1.9 Keywords

International student, Higher education, Customer service expectation, Service management, Service quality, Quality expectations and SERVQUAL.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Quality Expectations in Higher Education

Awareness of students' expectations is an essential part of delivering quality educational service. Hill (1995) demonstrates an interesting study where he exhibits the expectations and perceptions about university administration of a group of undergraduate students in a United Kingdom university. Hill rounded off about rationality of students' expectations amid the time of their university experience and proposed that they were likely shaped before arriving at the university. Also, students' observation of service encountered showed less stability over time. Hill (1995) further suggested evaluating the students' expectations before university resumption and not amid their stay at the university. Brenders, Hope and Ninnan (1999) also discovered right ways to evaluate expectations only at the start of the university studies, taking into consideration that at that point expectations are at best unclear and centred on irrational equivalence with secondary school experiences. Hill (1995) further stresses the value of placing expectations as closely as possible with what can be delivered concerning service quality. Yeo (2008, pg. 266) also admit with the importance of customer expectations in higher education and said, "*Management of student expectations is fundamental to ensuring appropriate service quality in higher education.*"

2.1 Internationalisation of UK Higher Education System

The international business of higher education or the scholastic private enterprise as it has been marked by Slaughter and Leslie (1997) is focused around information, plans and individuals moving over international boundaries. Higher Education has dependably had a universal area (Gacel-Avila 2005; Marginson and Rhodes 2002) and researchers have a long history of cross border developments. Naidoo (2006) stated that in the most recent decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the 21st century the worldwide development of students, staffs, projects and even establishments arrived at another level. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) evaluates that there were 2 million global students studying outside their country of residence in 2000 (OECD, 2010).

According to Ryan (2012), this number had multiplied by 2010 to 4.1 million and is evaluated to develop to no less than 7 million by 2020. In the United Kingdom (UK) the global student populace likewise developed fundamentally over the same period, developing from 231,000 (11 percent of the aggregate UK student populace) in 2000 to 370,000 (15 percent) in 2009 (HESA, 2011). Global Higher Education is a critical industry in all the Anglophone nations (Caruana and Spurling 2007; Poole, 2001; Van de Wende, 2001) and is progressively important to the economies of those nations. According to Enders (2004); Smemby and Trondal (2005), International Higher Education is also progressively critical to universities and HE institutions (HEIs) in mainland Europe plus some key educational hub around the world; towns like Singapore, Hong Kong, and Kuala Lumpur, that play host to different world wide branch campuses (Koutsantoni, 2006; Naidoo, 2006).

Friedman (2005); Guest (2001) states that the growth in the global business of higher education parallels a comparable time of uncommon development in the levels of world trade. For example, UK institutions now rival forcefully with international competitors and an expanding number of on-line challengers (Collini, 2012; Healey, 2008).

In the UK, the reaction to this global rivalry conveys what needs be in two primary ways. Firstly, there is a stress on boosting university reputations, through creating global research (and the university's position in league tables that assess research output) and furthermore intensifying attempts to attract fee paying global students who are frequently viewed as key to the monetary survival of HEIs in the UK and elsewhere (De Vita and Case 2003; Scott, 2002). Perhaps as a result, Peng (2009) states that staffs working in higher education in the UK sense that the internationalisation of UK universities is simply market seeking with a near common importance on recruiting wide-ranging students (Bennett and Kane, 2009; Turner and Robson, 2007).

Businesses looking for internationalisation strategies in the UK and other English speaking countries have not generally been tested by university staff (De Vita and Case, 2003) or student association (NUS Scotland, 2010). This may be on the grounds that they believe their universities need the revenue from international student charges, however it could also be that staff and students associations unimportantly have a shared understanding of what internationalisation is neither what it implies for them (Healey, 2008). Hence there is no basic reason to address and explore (Docherty, 2013).

Conclusively, Healey (2008); Shattock (2010) said regardless, twenty-first century institutions, university staffs and student work and study in a larger aggressive international higher education industry in which higher education supplier contend to enrol the best staff, deliver the best research and create solid international reputations.

2.2 Nature of Higher Educational Services

The philosophy for a different exploration of services marketing centres on the reality of a number of characteristics of services that are regularly cited in the literature: intangibility, inseparability of production and consumption, perishability and heterogeneity (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1985). Kotler and Fox (1995) state that all of these characteristics pertain to educational services and, as in services marketing generally; these attributes need a certain marketing strategy application. Life cycle, encounters and market share, which are the regular determinants of productivity that provides for strategic planning, are not effectively connected to the service firm. In this way, development strategies need to be changed (Carman and Langeard, 1980). The gap between customers' desires and feelings may be substantially bigger in service organisations than it is in manufacturing firms as services have few clearly defined and visible cues (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1990). The conceptual nature of services causes issues for both suppliers and consumers. It is hard for service suppliers to distinguish their offerings from those of competitors, while it is evenly hard for consumers to measure a service before it is received and consumed (Hill, 1995). The problems in pre purchase rating also influence the customers' quality expectations.

Intangibility is the elementary variance between services and goods as services are performances, rather than objects, they are not visible, tasted, felt or touched in the same approach in which goods can be perceived (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1985). By their characteristics, services cannot be felt, tasted, or obtained (Edgett and Parkinson, 1993). Normally, services are untouchable, heterogeneous, decomposable, and need simultaneous production and utilisation (Zeithaml et al., 1985; Ahmed et al., 2002). End-users mostly relate intangibility with top-level risk (Cubillo, J. M., Sánchez, J., and Cerviño, J., 2006). Consequently, intangibility interferes with the communication of services to the customer (Rathmell, 1966) and the setting of prices

for international education (Mazzarol, 1998). Consequently, the decision process of customers is affected by indirect operations of service evaluation. Customers analyse features such as the image of the brand, the organisation, and the country of destination.

The Inseparability of production and utilisation includes the problems of service marketing. It entails the simultaneous production and utilisation that represents most services. According to Regan (1963), goods are first manufactured, then sold and then utilised while services are first sold, then produced and utilised simultaneously. Since the consumers must be in attendance during the production of many services e.g. (haircuts, airplane trips etc.), inseparability is seen by (Carman and Langeard 1980, pg. 8) as "*something that forces the buyer into intimate contact with the production process*". This is usually the problem with education, where student engagement in their learning process is an important factor in determining success (Shuell and Lee, 1976). The service productivity and value rely not only on the potentials of the service provider's employees, but also on the potentials of the customers, which again can affect quality management uncertainty (Hill, 1995). Also, a lot of service engagement requires close direct interaction between a service provider and a customer. Satisfactory interaction perceived by the customers may depend on a variety of factors, ranging from the image of the service provider (academic or support staff) and his/her assessed expertise, to the personality features of, and the social activity between the participants. Though, it might be hard for students to assess their own contribution earlier when they are shaping their quality expectations of higher education.

Owlia and Aspinwall (1996) said that the contact among customers themselves becomes important; this is correct for higher education when considering the effect of students on one another. This is definitely correct for higher education since most valued attributes cannot be seen, felt, or held earlier; production and utilisation of the service are inseparable on account of personal contact (e.g. among lecturer and students) plays a vital role; and value differs clearly in different situations (from students to students, lecturer to lecturer, class to class, etc.). Rowley (1997, pg. 10) talked about the value of contact among students by saying, "*The significance of student-to-student interaction may be greater than the customer-to-service agent interaction*". Hill (1995) stated that customer is an integral part of the service operation. Since the human contact and labour strength are associated with the delivery of most

services, they are diverse, as each service operation is distinct. This results in a lack of status, which denotes that service quality can differ greatly from one circumstance to the next inside the same organisation (Berry, Zeithaml and Parasuraman, 1985). Without doubt, these features have crucial effects on the delivery of service quality – and for higher education institutions that are mainly in the line of service provision.

Perishability is the final of the four usual features of services. Perishability denotes that services can't be preserved (Bessom and Jackson 1975) since services are operations that can't be stored; service organisations often find it difficult to control supply and demand (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1985). Harvey and Busher (1996) in their study observed the tie among perishability and inseparability and in addition said that learning and training are inseparably laced. Unlike visible goods, services are temporary, to the level that they can be utilised only as long as the events or operation continues. Hence, their use is quick and mass production that may be viable with predictable goods is impossible in connection to services (Hill, 1995). In education, e learning has been somewhat of an exception to this rule.

According to Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1985) each outstanding feature of services risks to specific issues for service marketers and entails unique strategies for relating with them. Hill (1995) emphasises the importance of the results that these features have on the delivery of service quality. Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1993) further spotted that the differentiating features of services may mess up the expectations development process. Viewing what service quality signifies to students, but may be more intangible than initially perceived. Because the service notion in education has philosophical values, evaluating its perceptions introduces a question (Durvasula, Lysonski and Madhavi, 2011).

2.3 Defining the customer of higher education

The topic of quality in higher education (HE) has experienced increasing attention, following the plan set by service industries globally (O'Neill and Palmer, 2004). According to Hill (1995), Service quality has various definitions to different people but Berry, Zeithaml and Parasuraman (1994) see customers as the sole evaluator of service quality. In higher education, there are several stakeholders, all of whom have separate perceptions and expectations of higher education. Rowley (1997) said the higher

education (HE) stakeholders involve: students, the parents and family, the locality, the public, the government, the (HE) regulators, staff, local officials, and the current and potential companies. All of these stakeholders are worried about the final result or the graduate. There have been different opinions in the text on who is highly regarded to be the main customer. Rinehart (1993) recommends that it would be in the universities' best notice to hold the possible owners as the main customers by making their graduates sound for employment.

According to Jaraiedi and Ritz (1994), in a school setting, the customer can be the student; the Government and private companies that employ the graduating students and the customer can also be the combination of the two. The most general view, nevertheless, is to respect the student as the main customer. If the main customer is the owner, then what is communicated should be assessed extra closely to tell if the education that the students are getting offers them with the tools required to triumph at their employments (Jaraiedi and Ritz, 1994). Then again, Jaraiedi and Ritz (1994) consider how the students are being trained should have a greater importance than what is being trained. The syllabus may be offering the students with the correct tools the hiring organisations want their entry-level staffs to have, but if that syllabus is not delivered in a way the students learn and can relate the knowledge, who is happy?? Neither the students nor the organisations that hire them.

In this study, the student is seen as the main customer and the quality expectations are studied from the students' point of view. Seeing the student as the main customer is also reinforced by the fact that in order to participate in the higher education marketplace, institutions need to build strategies that will interest a justifiable cut of the market but If higher educational institutions are to build strategies that will interest a justifiable cut of the market, they need to recognise their customers, understand their requests and build strategies to meet those needs. (Joseph and Joseph, 1998, Yeo, 2008).

2.4 Service quality in higher education

The rising significance of services has led to a higher level of concern in services marketing and numerous writers have examined the problems related to evaluating and managing service quality (Bitner 1990; Zeithaml et al. 1990, 1993; Teas 1993;

Boulding et al. 1993). So, it is not shocking that academics have suggested a range of service quality factors.

Service quality can be divided into two subcomponents that are technical quality and functional quality (Gronroos, 1984). According to Gronroos (1984), the former relates to what is offered during the service development, such as knowledge and tangibles, while the functional quality means the way in which the service is offered. Lately, he suggested that there are seven factors or determinants of suitable service quality: attitudes and behaviour, professionalism and skills, accessibility and flexibility, service recovery, reputation and credibility, servicecape, reliability and trustworthiness (Grönroos, 2000). According to Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991), there are two different approaches to service quality: two-dimensional and three-dimensional. The two dimensional approach assesses service quality from the customers perspective, concentrating on process quality and output quality of service production (Lehtinen and Lehtinen, 1991). This methodology is like the technical and functional quality framework initiated by Gronroos. The three dimensional approach assesses service quality on three distinctive dimensions: physical quality, corporate quality, and interactive quality (Lehtinen and Lehtinen, 1991).

Notwithstanding the range of suggested definitions, the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985, 1988) stands the most commonly adapted and tested construct of service quality (Kueh and Voon, 2007). According to Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1993), the model recommends that customer evaluation of service quality effects from a judgement of service expectations with reality performance. The SERVQUAL mechanism utilises 22 questions to evaluate both expectations and perceptions housing five service dimensions namely: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988) but adapted to six dimensions for the purpose of this research adding employability to the original 5 dimensions. Reliability means accuracy, dependability and consistent performance of a service. Responsiveness means timely and willingness to assist the customer. Tangibility means the visible service qualities such as looks of employees, facilities and equipment. The dimension of assurance includes the capability, politeness and integrity of staffs that make customers trust and assured. Finally, empathy comprises caring and customised attention plus understanding

customer wants and appropriate approach to the service. The dimension of service quality diagram in figure 2 is shown below.

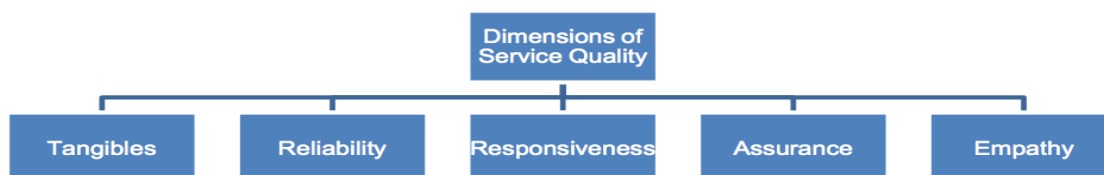


Figure 2: The dimensions of quality (based on Zeithaml et al. 1990, 26)

The SERVQUAL mechanism has been commonly used in analyses covering a range of service businesses such as healthcare, public sector, higher education, banking and telemarketing (Kueh and Voon, 2007). Though, it has created criticisms as regards its fundamental approach and concept (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). Whilst service quality is to be perceived as "related to an attitude." It could be that added information might be generated for executives and scholars' equally if the evaluation of the construct is similar to an attitude-based perception (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). Teas (1993) query the rationality of the way SERVQUAL constructs and evaluate expectations. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) replied to this criticism by defining their theory of expectations in a different way. Notwithstanding these limitations, SERVQUAL appear to be moving fast to an organised status (Buttle, 1996).

In higher education, several researchers (Soutar and McNeil, 1996; Tan and Kek, 2004; McElwee and Redman, 1993; Yeo, 2008) have used or adapted the SERVQUAL model of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985, 1988) that evaluates quality formed on the gaps among customer's expectations and their perceptions of service performance. These researchers encourage the application of SERVQUAL in higher education and show that it can be important and useful in examining service quality in this perspective. Though, the subject of quality expectations and their experiences remains to be explored in higher education. Particularly the position of tuition fees and culture in forming students' quality expectations has been poorly studied.

2.5 Forming Customer Quality Expectations

Yeo (2008) suggests that service quality is too complex; it is connected with the physical, conceptual and conventional aspects of higher education. According to

Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990), service quality perceptions emanate from how well a supplier performs compared to the customers' expectations about how the supplier should operate. The writers define service quality as the difference among customers' expectations and perceptions. Otherwise stated, if the customer's expectations are met, service quality is seen to be satisfactory; if they are not met, it is seen to be less than satisfactory; and if they are surpassed, it is seen to be more than satisfactory (pleasing the customer) Hill, 1995). A related approach is used by Gronroos (1984) that argued that customer perceptions of service quality effect from relating expectations before getting the service, and their real experience of the service afterwards.

The value of comprehending customers' expectations is generally recognised in service quality literature and Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990) stated that understanding what customers need is possibly the most crucial step in rendering quality service. The service quality of respective learning experience, especially in higher education, is rare as it is mostly decided by the expectation of the student (Yeo, 2008). There is some argument in the text about the exact category and the part of quality expectations. In service management literature, there is significant distinction in the interpretation of expectation (Coye, 2004). Afterwards, a concise evaluation of the two dominant theories is presented and the definition to be utilised in this study is addressed.

Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1993) said, in the customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction text, expectations are seen as guesses made by customers about what is likely to transpire during a forthcoming deal or trade. Oliver (1981, pg. 33) states "*It is generally agreed that expectations are consumer defined probabilities of the occurrence of positive or negative events if the consumer engages in some behaviour.*" He continued that the customer always go into a deal with various expectations that can be rated on a probability ranging from positive to negative. Boulding, Kalra, Staelin and Zeithaml (1993) also agree that in the satisfaction text, expectations are normally seen as guesses of upcoming events and Prakash (1984) reports predictive expectations in a way a brand is likely to behave on a brand properties. The predictive expectations are reliable with the typical belief of expectations as individual possibilities of the occasion of upcoming events (Coye, 2004). He added by saying, otherwise, the word

expectation has been utilised to signify what customer preferably needs (normative expectations).

Normative expectations of upcoming events that are functionalised as either wanted or ideal expectations signify the other of the two core principles that are frequently used (Boulding, Kalra, Staelin and Zeithaml, 1993). Spreng, MacKenzie and Olshavsky (1996) judge that it is likely to separate visibly between predictive expectations and wants at the theoretical level. They further define expectations as views about the possibility that a product is related with certain features, benefits, or results and wants are assessments of the degree to which those features, benefits, or results lead to the fulfilment of a person's beliefs. The service literature grasps that these normative expectations are declarations of what customers think a service supplier should provide rather than would provide (Coye, 2004). Prakash (1984) once said that normative expectations could be seen as how a product should perform so that customers' can be wholly satisfied. Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1993) use the term desired service for the normative level and defined it as the level of service the customer plans to receive. Furthermore, the authors said the desired service is a mixture of what the customer thinks can be and should be.

Normative expectations are fairly steady over time as they denote continuing customer needs about the degree of service they should obtain even if that degree of service is unattainable or impossible to provide (Hamer, Liu, Shaw-Ching and Sudharshan, 1999). Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1993) also approve that the anticipated service level veers to change in process and according to them, the position changes in an ascending direction due to the build-up of experiences. Coye (2004) stated that the normative expectations are regularly theorised as linking both customer needs and their opinions about what the service is able of provide.

Boulding, Kalra, Staelin and Zeithaml (1993) suggested that following the sample of previous work implying the consequence of many expectation principles; they propose two different types of expectations. Reliable with the expectations-as-predictions quality regularly used in the customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction (CS/D) literature, according to the authors, they recommend that customers shape expectations about

occurrence in their subsequent service meeting with a company. Besides, they refer to these expectations, as “will” expectations. Customers shape expectations about what should transpire in their following service meeting about what service customers feel they deserve. What customers think should transpire may vary as a result of what have been planted in them to expect by the service supplier, coupled with what the customer thinks as sensible and possible on the grounds of being told of a rival's service or experiencing the organisation's service.

Otherwise, the customer's perfect expectation can be (what a customer wants in a perfect sense) and may be discrete to what is sensible/ possible and/or what the service supplier tells the customer to expect. Also, since ideal expectations denote continuing wants and needs that remain unchanged by the full choice of marketing and viable factors assumed to affect the should expectation, we think ideal expectations are much more steady over time than customer expectations of what should happen (Boulding, Kalra, Staelin and Zeithaml, 1993). In addition to the main concepts, some other expectation principles have been suggested in service quality literature. A standard built by Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1993) proposes that customers have two stages of expectations; the normative stage that the writers refer to as the desired service, explains the stage of service the customer anticipates to receive and it is matched to a lower stage of expectations that is the limit of acceptable service. The variation between these two stages is called the “zone of tolerance” and it symbolises the degree to which customers are prepared to accept the diversity of service quality (Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman, 1993).

Coye (2004) said that the literature on expectations maintains a fairly open relationship in which the customers match their steady expectations about the service with their perceptions of the service provided. Hamer, Liu, Shaw-Ching and Sudharshan (1999), explored the variations in expectations during the service confrontation. The authors’ research proposes that customers’ revise their expectations always within a service confrontation and they also observed the intra-encounter experiences of expectations. A similar method was carried out by Coye (2004) who also supported the intra-encounter view of expectations.

2.6 Quality in Higher Education and the Role of Tutors

According to Harvey and Green (1993), quality in higher education is a multifaceted and complicated theory and a definite suitable definition of quality is unavailable. A consensus concerning "*the best way to define and measure service quality*" (Clewes, 2003 pg. 71) is not in existence yet. All stakeholders of higher education (e.g., students, government etc.) have a certain understanding of quality reliant on his or her exact desires. The services literature concentrates on observed quality, which effects from the evaluation of customer service expectations with their views of real performance (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1990). Consequently, O'Neill and Palmer (2004, pg. 42) define service quality in higher education as "*the difference between what a student expects to receive and his/her perceptions of actual service delivery*". Guolla (1999) demonstrates that students' perceived service quality as prior to student satisfaction. Constructive perceptions of service quality can result into student satisfaction and happy students may invite new students through word of mouth interaction and come back to the university to take further courses (retention) (Marzo-Navarro, Pedraja-Iglesias and Rivera-Torres, 2005, Wiers-Jenssen, Stensaker and Groggaard, 2002, Mavondo, Tsarenko and Gabbott, 2004 and Schertzer and Schertzer, 2004).

This study observes how tutors should perform and which potentials they should have (desire expectations) from a student's standpoint. The topic of customer expectations overall and desire expectations in precise is still a forgotten area (Yim, Gu, Chan and Tse, 2003 and Pieters, Bottschen and Thelen, 1998). Customers can use such desire expectations as citation principles for satisfaction decisions (Singh and Widing, 1991). Also, Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1993) describe that desire expectations are steadier and less reliant on the exact service situation than other forms of expectations. Hence, studying the essence of desire expectations is an essential role to the area of service quality in higher education.

Pieters, Bottschen and Thelen, 1998 (1998, pg. 757) propose that the "*extent to which customers attain their goals depends partly on the behaviour of service employees*" and Oldfield and Baron (2000) illustrate higher education as a "clean" service and spot the significance of the quality of individual interactions. Therefore, one of the primary beliefs of this study is that for students, the qualities and manners of tutors have a

meaningful influence on their perceptions of service quality. Numerous researchers in the services literature approve this statement; Hartline and Ferrell (1996) for instance think that the manners and approaches of customer interaction employees mainly determine the customers' perceptions of service quality. Findings also imply that the human communication component is vital in determining if customers think service delivery satisfactory (Chebat and Kollias, 2000). Bitner, Booms and Mohr (1994) identify that in services, the essence of the personal communication between the customer and the employee habitually influence satisfaction.

In higher education subject, Hansen, Hennig-Thurau and Wochnowski (1997) initiated an acceptable mechanism to assess modules or units of schoolwork. The authors' findings imply that the directional quality of the tutor is the key effect on the perceived quality of modules. Equally, Hill, Lomas and MacGregor (2003) discover that the quality of the tutor goes to the most critical factors in the delivery of high quality education. Pozo-Munoz, Reboloso-Pacheco and Fernandez-Ramirez (2000, pg. 253) support, "*Teaching staff are key actors in a university's work*". So, the manners' and approaches of tutors should be the main element of students' perceptions of service quality in higher education. If tutors realise what their students think, they may be able to adjust their way of acting towards their students' core expectations, which should have an encouraging effect on their perceived service quality and their stages of satisfaction.

In this study, expectations are described as "*predictions about what is likely to happen*" (Walker 1995, pg.6). Therefore, the essence of expectations evaluated in this research is predictive instead of normative. In the actual part of this research, the students are requested to demonstrate the level that they think that the university where they go to have the qualities described in the questions asked through questionnaires. So, this study assesses the students' expectations of what their perceptions should be like.

2.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has studied the literature concerning the quality of higher education services, the theory of service quality and the customers of service quality. In summary, it has been known that the theory of service quality is complex and multidimensional in nature, making it increasingly hard to evaluate. It has also been proven that limiting

the evaluation of service quality to its specific context can be more useful than using a common methodology (e.g. SERVQUAL).

An evaluation of the literature has exposed a gap that this study endeavors to address. It is clear that service quality is considered an “intangible” and “unclear” theory by many authors (Carman, 1990; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1988). Besides, there seems to be no final tool that truly measures service quality (Clewes, 2003), since many quantity devices tend to be common and subject to several condemnations in terms of their consistency and legitimacy.

Hence, Abdullah (2006) proposes that evaluating service quality using existing tools is insufficient and that there is a need to study service quality from new viewpoints. In reflection of these topics, a gap exists to conduct examination that studies students’ views of services quality, using a quantitative method appropriate to the study context, in order to provide service quality management at UK universities with new insights about the present provision of service quality across UK higher education.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

According to Booth, Colomb and Williams (2003), Research is the collection of data to respond to a question that assists in solving a problem. This chapter outlines the processes that are used in this study so as to pilot the hypothesis of the problem under the study and give the reader a foundation for evaluating the authenticity of the finding, a comprehension on the motive/reason for choices being made and adequate details that this research can be reconstructed by another researcher. In this chapter, key objects regarding research methodology such as initial literature review, objectives and hypothesis, problem under the study and their methodologies formed for them, data instruments that involve analysis of data and the collection of data are explained in details and lastly at the end of this chapter, the limitation and conclusion of research methodology are known.

3.1 Methodological Viewpoint

The methodological perspective of a researcher attest to the way the world is looked at by researchers and what their beliefs and expectations are regarding their existence (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2011). Hence, when carrying out a research, it is vital to make sure that the philosophical perspective of the researcher is completely considered due to the fact that it underpins the chosen research strategy (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2011), making sure that the event being investigated is properly comprehended (Johnson and Clarke, 2006).

3.2 Research Philosophy

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2011), research methodology can be divided into six layers. The layers are:

LAYER 1

Research Philosophy (divided into four parts) - Positivism, Realism, Interpretivism and pragmatism.

LAYER 2

Research Approaches (divided into two parts) – Deductive and Inductive.

LAYER 3

Research Strategies (divided into seven parts) – Experiment, Survey, Case study, Action research, Grounded theory, Ethnography and Archival research.

LAYER 4

Research Choices (divided into three parts) – Mono method, mixed methods and Multi method.

LAYER 5

Time Horizon (divided into two parts) – Cross-sectional and longitudinal.

LAYER 6

Research Techniques & Procedures (divided into 2) – Data collection and Data analysis.

This research will follow (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2011, p.108) “*Onion*” process showed in the diagram below.

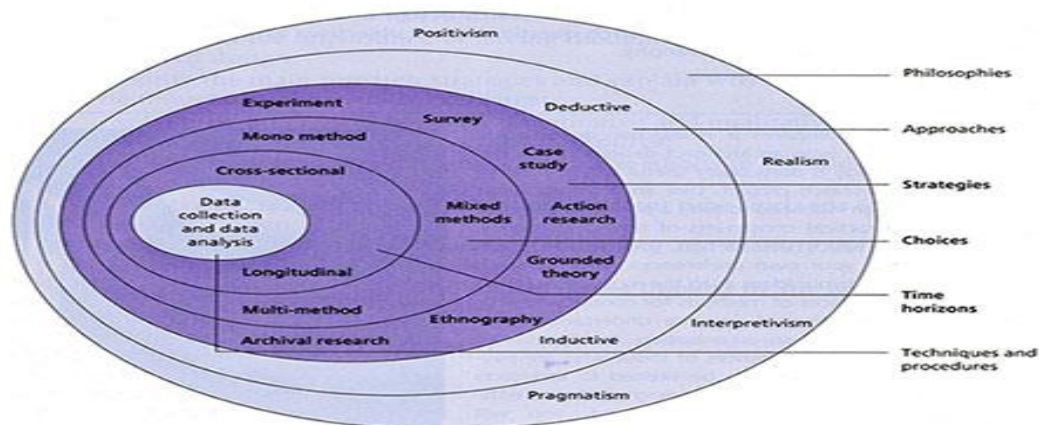


Figure 3: The Research “*Onion*”

Source: (Saunders, Philip and Thornhill, 2011, Pg.108).

Research Philosophy is a term regarding the evolution of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2011). To determine the researchers' viewpoint, two philosophical concepts need to be reviewed and they are, Epistemology and Ontology (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2011).

Epistemology: Is defined as the study of knowledge (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Contrary, knowledge can be seen as theoretical and neutrally available to everyone or otherwise dependent and non-objective on individual's encounter (Long, White, Friedman and Brazeal, 2000). "*The conflicting issue with epistemology is whether or not the social world should be studied according to the same principles, procedures and ethos as the natural science*" (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p.16). Positivism supports the implementation of the techniques of the natural science to the examining of social reality and beyond. According to Bryman and Bell (2007), positivism can involve the following principles:

- The theory of phenomenism states that only the phenomena and knowledge affirmed by the senses can truly be justified as knowledge.
- The theory of deductivism states that the aim of this theory is to create hypotheses that can be piloted which will give access to explanations of laws to be evaluated.
- The inductivism principle states that knowledge is gained through the collection of facts that gives the foundation for laws.
- Objective needs to be carried out in a value free manner.
- There is a clear difference between normative statements and scientific statements and a notion that the pasts are the real field of scientist.

According to Bryman and Bell (2007), some writers affected by individual intellectual philosophies believe that interpretivism, which differs from positivism, shares a

viewpoint that the main concern of social sciences are people and as well as their institutions are basically distinct from that of the natural science. This means that social world learning demands a strategy that distinguishes humans against the natural sequence. In summary, interpretivism is concerned with the empathic comprehension of human action instead of the forces that work on it, while positivism gives importance to the reason and comprehension for human behavior (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

This study takes the perspective of a positivist viewpoint of epistemology. The researcher is going to analyse international students' expectations and experience at four universities in UK using an adapted SERVQUAL model based on previous studies from where we acquire more knowledge. This topic entails about social phenomena that involves students' expectation from their viewpoint and service quality. According to (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988), this knowledge will be established via an objective measurement utilising the measurable dimensions of service quality. There is a link between theory and research in this study stating that observations are gathered in a way that is affected by pre-existing theories. Nonetheless, we are taking an epistemological stance due to the fact that some pre-existing theories are not truly scientific and must be implemented in observations. The researchers' concern is in knowing if the SERVQUAL model can be applied in the students' context and distinguishing what dimension of service quality students are pleased with. A positivist perspective will allow us achieve the objectives cited earlier.

Taking a positivist viewpoint, the researcher and respondents are self-supporting from each other and they will be examined without being affected by the researcher.

Ontology: According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2011) he states that ontology is a branch of philosophy that involves the study of reality and shows how a researcher handles various phenomena. Ontology is gotten from the Latin word "*ontologia*" which is the science of being. Wand and Weber (1993, pg.220) describes ontology as a "*branch of philosophy concerned with articulating nature and structure of the world*". According to Bryan and Bell (2011), ontology entails the nature of social entities and is concerned with our perception of the existence of objects in the world. It doubts the objectivity of reality notwithstanding our belief of it, or if it only exist because we believe so or it is subjective (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2011). Bryman and Bell

(2011) suggest that a researcher must therefore debate if social entities should be made relevant as an objective entity which have a reality outward to social performers, or if they should be regarded as a social structure from the philosophies and actions of social performers.

Traditionally, quantitative research is a probable choice for an objectivist while subjectivist will approve qualitative research. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the key distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is that quantitative researchers adopts measurement while qualitative does not.

Though, the choice of deciding if one should use qualitative or quantitative methods strongly lies on the nature of the research problem (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). In addition, (Weber, 2004) argues the process of strongly binding to a particular paradigm for research, proposes that the suitable results arrive from selecting the most suitable method that are important to the present research datas. According to Jankowicz (2005); Malhotra and Birks (2007), various authors indicate using both datas due to the fact that both methods interrelate; this is to say that usage of this would not be used in isolation of each other. According to Malhotra and Birks (2007), often times many researchers are led into using a rigid position favouring either qualitative or quantitative research which can damage the credibility and validity of the research.

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2011), the most suitable theoretical belief is based on the research aims and question. In regards to this claim, the researcher's perspective and the literature presented above, this study selects a positivist epistemological approach that centers on an ontological truth. Making use of an interpretivist strategy for the research would not be suitable for this context, given that this view focuses on individual judgment and feelings rather than taking on an organized objective truth. Rather, this study attempts to take on a scientific process to research so as to accomplish validity and discover the real world.

As demonstrated above, it is vital to lower respondents of the study to just figures and ignoring their communication in the research procedure. So, since the method adopted is based on the research problem, this study goes against the conventional use of only quantitative research for a positivist method and uses the combination of both

quantitative and qualitative assessment where needed. Strongly using a preferred perspective by applying either quantitative or qualitative evaluation might damage the results and possibly affect the credibility and sincerity of the research, which influences the validity of the research. In addition, it is rational combine qualitative research methods (traditionally related to the interpretivist research) in a positivist research. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) recommend that researchers should value both qualitative and quantitative research, despite the theoretical approach selected by the researcher. Furthermore, the authors opted the users of this method as the “*Pragmatic researcher*”. Researchers of this nature move to treat problems in a rational and practical way that centres more on realistic rather than conventional considerations. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) explains that it is agreed on that research methodologies are just tools which are outlined to assist our comprehension of the world.

According to Sechrest and Sidani (1995), the “*pragmatic researcher*” values that integrating both qualitative and quantitative method in the same research can boost the credibility of a methodology, balancing a few of the shortcomings and issues related to personal research method. Furthermore, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) added that including qualitative data can be mostly helpful in assessing and upholding relationships that have been uncovered through quantitative information, since depending on a particular kind of information (figures or words) can be entirely restricting.

3.3 Research Approach

According Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2011), the second layer of the research onion is inductive and deductive method. The framework of a theory starts with the principal idea and returns to earn logical conclusions on the subject under scrutiny (Belkaoui, 2005). This recurrently Takes a positivism theory and is most suitable which has a line of present literature. Considering the whole idea of theories, higher sample sizes and quantitative research are often associated with the deductive method. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the most important reward in applying this method is that deductive approach grows more noticeably linear where in a rational sequence precedes the other one step at a time.

The inductive method is often applied based on its impartial way of seeing and analysing research result, notwithstanding having few or no existing literature. Qualitative research is frequently applied in severe cases in the inductive approach and literatures can be gotten from this approach.

The researcher in this study is determined to make use of the survey and quantitative approach, which is known to be a research method. According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, (1985), the SERVQUAL process can be applied to assess the service delivery idea of international students. An improved SERVQUAL questionnaire adapted from Rajkhowa & Raghav (2013) consisting of 28 elements and is divided into 3 parts (Students Information, Students experience and expectation and additional comments) is implemented in the survey to gather information and to pinpoint the gaps between the expectations and real experience of international students at universities in UK. The questions are introduced as statements and the participants are required to show the level to which they consent on a 7-point Likert scale (1= Least Important, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7=Most Important).

“SERVQUAL can be adapted or supplemented to fit the characteristics or specific research need of a particular organisation” (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988 pg.31).

According to Babakus and Mangold (1992), SERVQUAL scale has been applied in different service sectors such as Banking, Higher Education services, Telecoms etc.

3.4 Research Design

According to Bryman and Bell (2007), a research design maintains a structure for gathering and evaluating data. Furthermore, (Bryman and Bell, 2007, pg.40), suggest that *“A choice of research design reflects decisions about the priority being given to a range of dimensions of a research process which are: expressing causal connections between variables, generalizing to larger groups of individuals than those actually forming part of the investigation, understanding behavior and meaning of that behaviour in its specific social context and having a temporal (i.e. over time) appreciation of social phenomena and their interconnections”*. Additionally, (Bryman and Bell, 2007) state that there are five notable kinds of research design: longitudinal

design (cohort study or panel study), social survey design or cross-sectional, comparative design, case study design and experimental design (quasi-experiment). Every research design is affected in regards to the criteria for analyzing the findings for the research.

This design relies on more than one instance due to its interest in the connection between instances, in some point in time that means that information are gathered on variables at the same time. The information has to be quantifiable so as to create variations between the cases. Also, (Bryman and Bell, 2007) suggest that the design gives room for the assessment of relationship among variables and no trivial assumptions can be initiated due to information being gathered at the same time cannot influence any variable.

The researcher selects this design on the basis that so many researches have been made on subjects that connects to the topic quantifying customer's satisfaction and service quality. This has always been an issue to try and delimit our research distinctively but this will be helpful in restructuring the research questionnaires. It gives the ability to distinguish and group the study variables, and this makes the design easy in a way that they can recover all information required from the participants. The researcher is researching on the international student expectations in four UK Universities and will be working with the participants (students) to seek out their experience based on the programmes; delivery on service quality and the dimensions of the SERVQUAL model. This allows us to determine the participant's perception on service quality at the universities in a quantitative approach and afterwards conclude by analysing their gap score.

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), the capacity of the SERVQUAL model applied for quantifying service quality are structurally utilised when surveys are carried out, since its interest is on the experience and expectation of people based on the services rendered by students. In order to achieve students perception of service quality, it is suitable to apply personalised completed questionnaires that allows the participants the possibility to anonymously and freely provide answers that expresses their experience and expectations. This questionnaire is adapted from the SERVQUAL model that makes it impartial and not biased.

It is rarely possible to manage or influence a variable in a business research, which makes it a good reason to rely on social survey. Variables such as sex, age, Social background and nationality are accessible and cannot be tampered with (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Therefore, it makes it entirely unfeasible to apply in the experimental design and it leaves the research to recourse to the social survey.

3.5 Research Sampling

The sample involves students who applied for the international masters' degree program in the UK universities during the winter of 2013 all through 2014. The questionnaires were circulated to the students through e-mail by making use of the University's students individualised e-mail account. The e-mail were circulated to the respondent's higher education institutions and divided amongst applicants of the international master degree program with the assistance of a contact in the universities in which the research is being carried out (University A (71%), University B (3.1%), University C (5.5%) and University D (6.5%).

The first sample of the questionnaire was sent to the students in July 2014. The first stage of the sample size for the first questionnaire was dispersed to 141 students and the researcher got a response rate of 41.02%. A good number of participants for the second phase of the questionnaire gave a response rate of 49.48%. Though, there were responses that were not useable for this research, so the concluding response rate for the research is 86.1% this is because a total of 232 students were sent the second questionnaires that included the 141 students from the first questionnaire. 71% questionnaires were collected from University (A) students and the questionnaire took 7 minutes to complete.

The first stage of the information gathered was carried out after the students had stayed for over 5month in the university. The nationalities and information background of the students were asked in the first stage as no vital changes were expected to take place in this stage. The information for the responses in the second stage were circulated to the students and gathered based on the response rate gotten from the first questionnaire. To attain the needed result, Mishra (2009) suggest that the least visible sample size should be fifty.

Finally, the end-results are mostly applied to international master degree program in the United Kingdom since the participants are regarded in this context.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

Primary and secondary information sources will be used to answer the research questions. The primary information will mostly be gotten through the distribution of questionnaires while secondary sources such as archives and previous studies will be retrieved from different database such as University of Chester (LIS), Emerald and Business source premier database so as to gain valid theories and empirical findings which can be used so as to achieve a perfect comprehension of service quality structure and ways by which the SERVQUAL model can be applied to evaluate the gaps between students' experience and expectations. The parts of the questionnaires used in this research can be gotten from the appendix. The information gathered were examined by applying the SPSS (Statistical Package of Social Sciences) soft wares and the questions were coded in SPSS.

3.7 Limitations

3.7.1 Reliability

Reliability is the consistency of a measurement. Reliability is measured by simply using some measurements on the same subjects. Insufficient reliability devalues the focus of a single evaluation and lowers the power to track down measurement changes in experimental research.

According to Brysland and Curry (2001), they suggest that a peculiar advantage of SERVQUAL is the fact that it is a tried and tested tool that is used fairly for measuring purposes.

Critics of the SERVQUAL tool consist of Brown, Churchill and Peter (1993), who tried the tool and displayed solid reliabilities for both the perception (0.96) and expectation (0.94) section of the questionnaires via Cronbach's Alpha, proposing an increased levels of internal consistency and reliability (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). Majority of the users would concur to the fact that a complete and in-depth examination

of service needs and service quality in higher education offers an instrumental method to refining service quality in universities. SERVQUAL offers a comprehensive data about:

1. Student views of service (a standard proven by your own student base);
2. Presentation levels as perceived by students;
3. Students' remarks and recommendations; and
4. Impressions from universities board with respect to students' experience, expectation and satisfaction.

3.7.2 Validity

Validity according to (Lind, Marchal and Mason, 2005), talks on the arrangement between the importance of a measurement and its true significance. The measurement of validity is by matching one's capacities with standards that are as close to the true values as expected. Reduced validity also lowers the accuracy of a sole measurement, and it diminishes the capability to distinguish connections between variables in descriptive research.

Bryslan and Curry (2001) suggest that, SERVQUAL does, nonetheless, merit from being a statistically effective tool due to the outcome of widespread field-testing and improvement. It however eludes the downside of being observed by service handlers and providers as "*something that has been invented off the top of the head*" or a questionnaire that has been tampered to prompt certain forms of response.

As a standard and commonly relevant instrument, SERVQUAL can also be operated on a recurring, consistent basis and used for relative benchmarking purposes. Although, four universities have been used to assess the expectations and experience of international students but for future purposes, a larger sample should be considered so that more dimensions can be adapted to the original 5 dimensions of service quality (SERVQUAL), which will give a wider view of international service quality.

3.8 Rejection Methods

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2011) state that, there are various qualitative methods to study extremely subjective outlooks of participants. Focus, group discussions,

Interviews, and focus group are some of the approaches for qualitative research. However, the researcher had pondered on some of those approaches but due to the time constraint and impossibility of participants were rejected.

3.9 Ethical Consideration

According to Quinlan (2011), when starting a research from its introduction to completion, it is imperative to adhere to high ethical standards. The researcher obeyed the rules and policies of the universities under study. The questionnaire method was distributed without forcing it on participants and a cover letter complemented each questionnaire to give a short description and guideline about the investigation. Although, Dale, Arber and Proctor (1988) approves that the ethical difficulties related to questionnaire is fewer.

Zikmund (2000) propose that the ethical questions associated to a survey strategy are those related with general issues that are confidentiality, impartiality, transparency, and privacy. The researcher made sure the questionnaire is satisfactory and easy to comprehend by the participants, otherwise it can end up jeopardising the validity of the research or in most cases stops the research (Quinlan, 2011).

The validity and authenticity of this research was obeyed appropriately whilst starting the research. As outlined in the objectives of the research, the research remained reasonable and relevant. The result was validated in a sincere and well-defined method so that further reliability and authenticity can be offered for the research.

3.10 Summary

As with any methodology, it is usual for issues to occur during the data collection process. Though, the methodology demonstrated to be a very exciting part of the research study due to its irregular nature, only slight technological difficulties were faced.

This chapter has defined the research plan and method used to tackle the research questions that were suggested in chapter one. Initially, the introduction of the chapter, followed by the methodological standpoint of the researcher was defined, which influenced the justification of using survey as the primary data collection method. Then

it is the research philosophy, research approach, research design, sampling and data collection method. Conclusively, essential ethical issues connecting to the study were considered, while listing the techniques and procedures utilised to make sure the study continued within appropriate ethical boundaries.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter will present the data collected through the questionnaires survey distributed in four UK universities. This chapter concentrates on the data interpretation and analysis of results of the research. It also examines the results that answer to the supportive research questions in chapter one. The chapter ends with a summary of the results.

4.1 Analysis of data

Many questionnaires were distributed but a total of 99 participants (86.1%) across 20 nationalities returned the survey. The participants did not deem 6 of the questionnaires usable due to incompleteness. There were 92 postgraduate and 1 undergraduate international students' who completed the survey. Table 1 below provides information about the first section of the survey starting with the descriptive statistics of the gender followed by the level of study and nationalities.

Participant Details:

Table 1: Gender

Male	Female	N
53	40	93

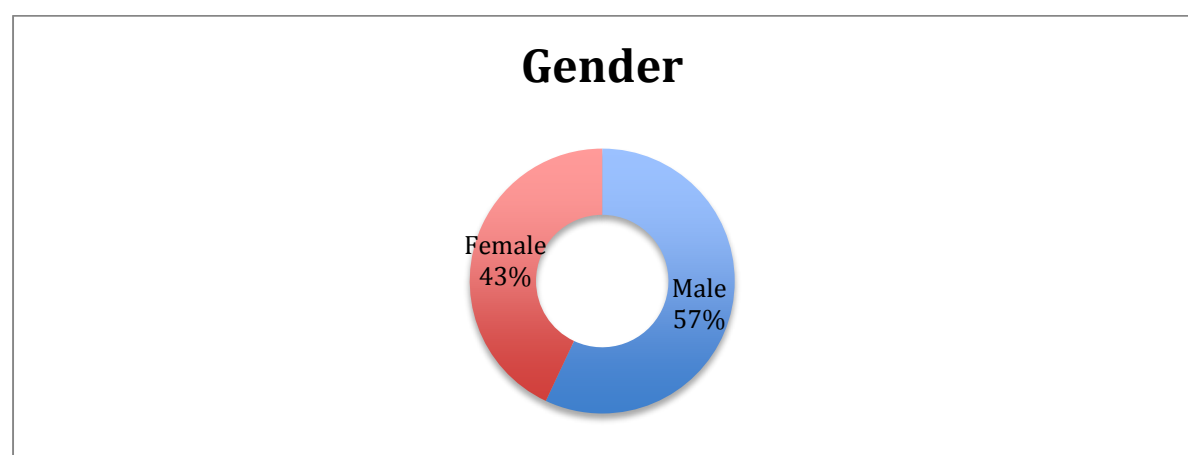


Figure 4: Pie chart showing the % of participants based on gender

Table 2: Level of Study

Undergraduate	Postgraduate
1	92

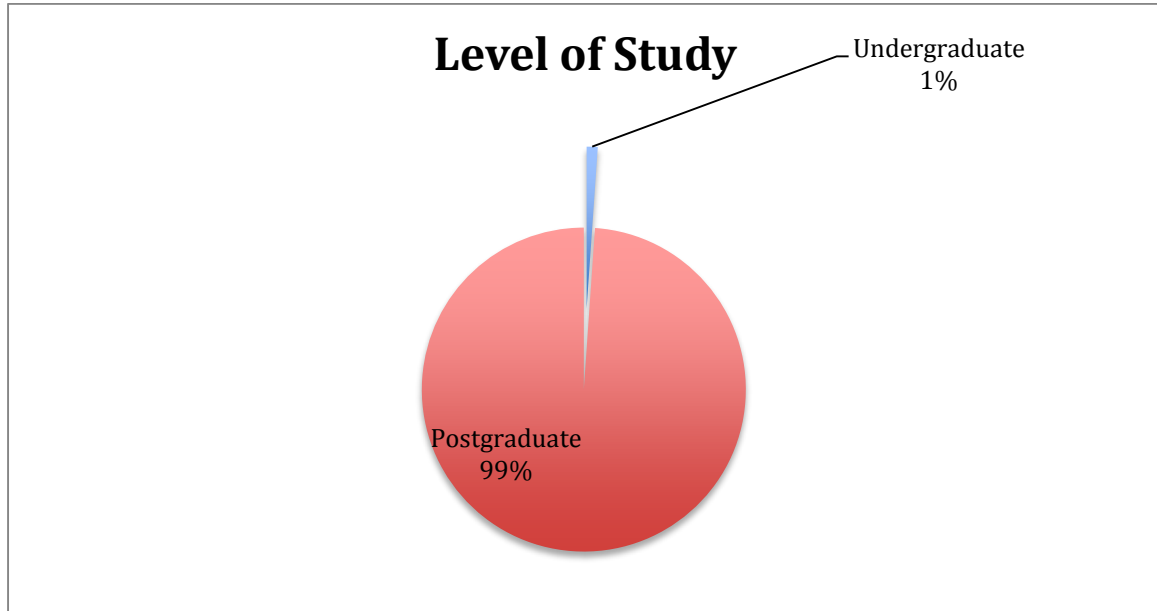


Figure 5: Pie chart showing the % of participants based on the level of study

Table 3: Country of Origin/Nationalities

Country of Origin	Number
India (IS)	23
Pakistan (IS)	6
Palestine (ME)	1
Nigeria (AF)	22
Ghana (AF)	5
Kuwait (ME)	1
Jamaica (AM)	1
Malaysia (SEA)	2
Jordan (ME)	2
Indonesia (SEA)	1
Thailand (SEA)	5
Vietnam (SEA)	1
Sri Lanka (IS)	1

Netherland	(EU)	2
Libya	(AF)	1
Peru	(AM)	1
Bangladesh	(IS)	2
Cameroon	(AF)	1
China	(CH)	6
Spain	(EU)	9

Countries Total	93 (N)
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Indian Subcontinent (IS)	South East Asia (SEA)	America (AM)	Africa (AF)	Europe (EU)	China (CH)	Middle East (ME)
34.4%	9.7%	2.2%	31.2%	11.8%	6.5%	4.3%

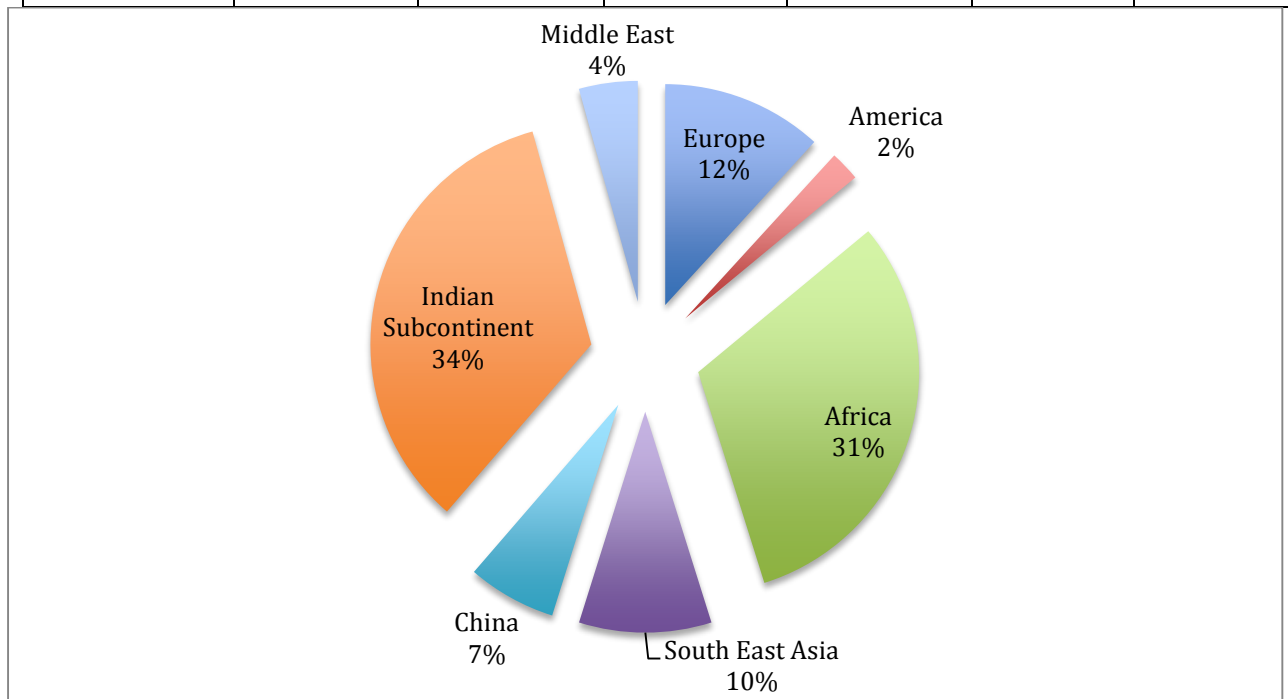


Figure 6: Pie chart showing the % of participants based on their countries of origin

4.2 Findings

4.2.1 Findings of service quality

The SERVQUAL educational service quality constructs were verified by carrying out a dimension analysis utilising the principle of component extraction technique. The Gap score were further calculated by calculating the expectation minus experience mean scores using the following formulae:

- Mean Expectation score = SUM of Expectation score /number of participants (N)
- Mean Experience score = SUM of Experience score /number of participants (N)
- Gap score = Mean Expectation score – Mean Experience score

The dimension analysis was carried out on the basis of the variables of each dimension. The SERVQUAL dimensions of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985, 1988) have been adapted from five dimensions to six dimensions for the purpose of this research. Findings have recommended that service quality scales need to be adapted to the study perspective (Carman, 1990; Carrillat, Jaramillo and Mulki, 2007), providing additional proof to support the view that service quality is context detailed.

The six dimensions were analysed through 28 items (see table 4). The six dimensions are as follows:

1. Tangibles
2. Reliability
3. Responsiveness
4. Assurance
5. Empathy
6. Employability

Table 4: Mean Score Comparison for Expectation and Experience for 28 statements across 6 dimensions (Scale 1 = least important, 7 = Most Important) N = 93

Service quality attributes/ questions		Mean Expectations	Mean Experience	Gap Score
Tangibility				
Q.1	Use of modern looking equipment	6.17	6.20	+0.03
Q.2	The physical facilities at the faculty are visually appealing	6.94	5.93	1.01
Q.3	The support services like library, computer etc.	6.16	6.39	+0.23
				(0.25)
Reliability				
Q.5	Ability to solve students' complaints on time	6.43	5.67	0.76
Q.11	Industry expert lectures organised by faculty	6.30	2.45	3.85
Q.4	Delivers services on time	6.00	5.89	0.11
Q.8	Experience level of faculty	6.18	5.96	0.22
Responsiveness				(1.23)
Q.15	Staff support during proposal development	6.22	5.14	1.08
Q.16	Design of course curriculum	6.32	4.98	1.34
Q.17	Faculty course work encourages teamwork and communication skills	6.04	5.39	0.65
Q.18	Courses contain basic knowledge and skill	6.16	5.65	0.51
Q.19	Usage of industry/ managerial case studies	6.26	5.49	0.77

Q.20	Faculty support on management research	6.25	5.62	0.63
				(0.83)
Assurance				
Q.7	Sufficient faculty/ support staffs	6.14	5.77	0.37
Q.9	Faculty staff theoretical knowledge and adequate qualification	6.33	6.15	0.18
Q.12	Management students' industrial visits/ trips	6.17	2.45	3.72
Q.14	Work on real life industrial projects	6.18	3.16	3.02
Q.21	Learning opportunity during management research	6.09	5.66	0.43
				(1.54)
Empathy				
Q.6	Honest interest in solving your problems	6.25	6.40	+0.15
Q.10	Refresher course to welcome new students with less experience on the programme	6.92	3.99	2.93
Q.13	On the job training/ work shadowing	6.23	2.62	3.61
Q.22	Teaching of entrepreneurial spirit by instruction and repetition	6.28	5.00	1.28
Q.27	Academic value addition	6.44	3.54	2.90
				(2.11)

Employability				
Q.23	Entrepreneurial spirit level after course completion	6.29	5.11	1.18
Q.24	Entrepreneurial demonstration level of managerial skill	6.26	5.23	1.03
Q.25	Employability enhancement after course completion	6.30	5.56	0.74
Q.26	Employment confidence after course completion	6.34	5.43	0.91
Q.28	Dividend on investment	6.34	5.24	1.10
				(1.00)

NB: The bracket signifies negative gap score.

4.3 Expectation and Experience gaps of 28 statements

Table 4 reveals the gap scores calculated for each item. The analysis has been done using an adapted SERVQUAL instrument developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985, 1988). The gap score is the difference between expected service quality and the perceived service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985, 1988). A positive (+) gap score indicates (satisfaction) that means the experience level is higher than that of expectation while (dissatisfaction) denotes a lower experience level as compared to the expectation. Nonetheless, on the basis of the results gotten through the questionnaire survey showed that out of 28 statements, only 3 statements demonstrates (satisfaction) of international students and 25 out of the 28 statements indicates a lower experience level as compared to expectations which further showed a dissatisfaction of international students at UK universities. This has resulted in the entire six dimensions summary to have a negative gap score but we can see that the universities have done well in question 6 that should have changed the overall empathy score but international students were dissatisfied regarding question 10, 13, 22 and 27 which further affect the overall empathy score. The same can be said also regarding the tangibility dimension

which have question 1 and 3 with a positive gap score but still couldn't change the overall gap score as international students are dissatisfied in question 2 which is a major gap score. Conclusively, we can say that the international students' expectations were higher than what they experienced at the universities under study. Improvement in the universities service management will go a long way in helping the university boost its student retention and remain competitive. This finding is in line with (DeShields, Kara and Kaynak, 2005) and they provide support for this claiming that institutions need to continue to deliver a high quality service and satisfy students in order to succeed in a competitive service environment.

4.4 Expectation and Experience gaps

A summary revealing the gaps in the expectation and experience for the sample population is presented in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Summary Gap Score for the Six Dimensions

Quality Dimensions	Expectation Mean	Experience Mean	Gap score
Tangibility	6.42	6.17	0.25
Reliability	6.23	5.00	1.23
Responsiveness	6.21	5.38	0.83
Assurance	6.18	4.64	1.54
Empathy	6.42	4.31	2.11
Employability	6.31	5.31	1.00

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985, 1988), The SERVQUAL instrument provides a structure to recognise weaknesses in the quality of service and also leads on how service companies can turn their imperfections into perfection. The gap scores shown above in this study reflects the satisfaction and dissatisfaction in services delivered to international students at four UK universities.

Bar-chart representation of the dimensions:

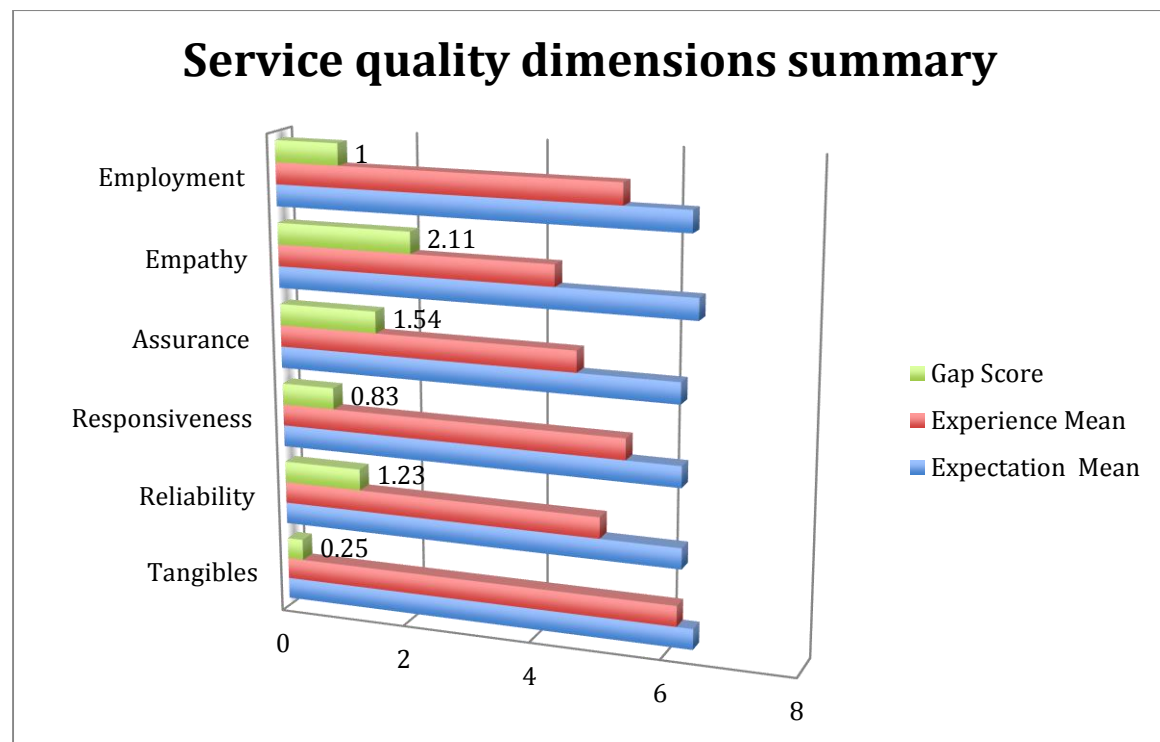


Figure 7: Gap between service quality dimensions

Expectation and Experience of customers (customers are regarded as international students' as presented earlier in the literature review) can be measure by the SERVQUAL tool. There are five quality dimensions incorporated in the model but adapted to six for the purpose of this study. The dimensions findings are shown as follow:

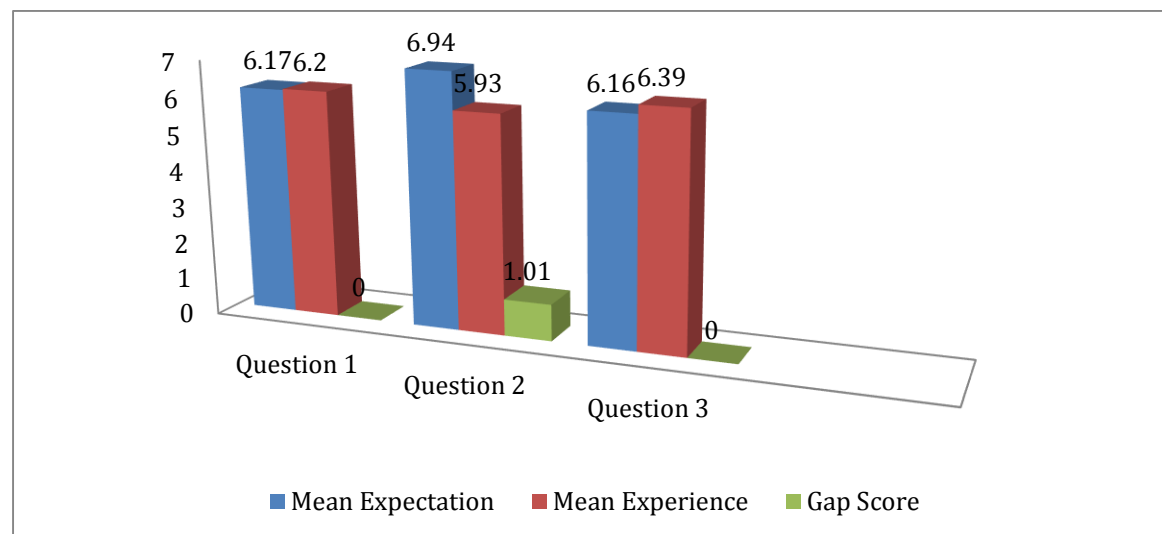
- **Tangibility:** Appearance of University of Chester physical facilities, equipment, staff and communication materials.
- **Reliability:** Ability to perform the promised services consistently and perfectly.
- **Responsiveness:** Willingness and ability to help students and provide timely services as promised.
- **Assurance:** The findings show the ability of university staff to communicate trust and assurance.
- **Empathy:** Understanding and concern of student's needs.
- **Employability:** The findings show the ability of the university to equip the students' with the right skills and exposure to meet the job industry requirements.

4.4.1 Description of dimension 1: Tangibles

The three statements were used to assess the service quality of tangible aspects of services. The statements are:

Tangibles	
Q.1	Use of modern looking equipment
Q.2	The physical facilities at the faculty are visually appealing
Q.3	The support services like library, computer etc.

Figure 8: Tangibles statements



From the above table 4, question 1 gap score is 0.03 (positive). The gap score indicates that the UK universities have not only met the expectations of international students on the use of modern looking equipment but also surpassed their expectations regarding this statement. The gap score is the lowest as compared to question 2 and question 3 of the tangibles statements. Although, the gap score is not major, it denotes that the UK universities are conscious about the technological aspect of its services in order to meet the expectations of international students.

As shown in table 4, question 2 gap score is 1.01 (negative). The gap score indicates that the UK universities have not met the expectations of international students regarding the visually appealing of physical facilities. The difference between the expectations and experience resulted in dissatisfaction. While the universities keeps on improving on their physical facilities, they have failed to meet the expectations of students. Rajkhowa and Singh Raghav (2013 pg.56) pointed out “*from a marketing perspective, it is important to recognise that one of the main comparisons students make is between what was communicated to them by the university before they left their home country and what they receive on arrival at the campus*”. This can be seen that students’ expectations are formed before leaving their home country. This further translates that customers are not only interested in excellence service provisions but also the organisation should have excellent physical facilities and deliver on their promise.

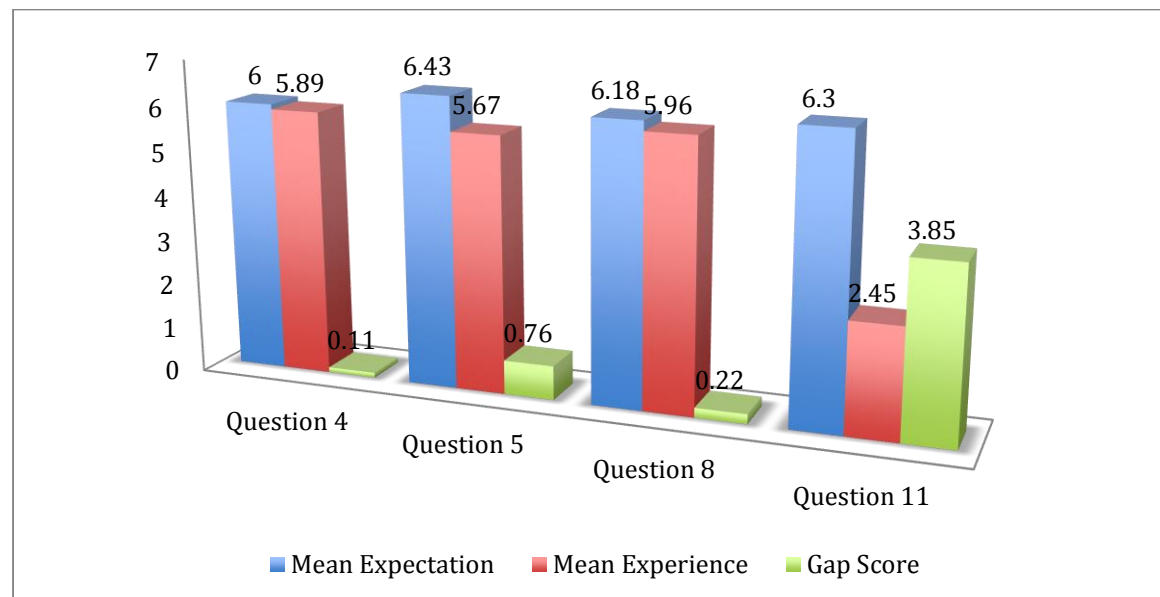
Question 3 gap score is 0.23 (positive). The gap score indicates that the universities under study have not only met the expectations of international students regarding the support services like library, computers etc. but has also surpassed the students’ expectations regarding the support services. The difference between expectations and experience resulted in satisfaction. Though, the gap score is higher than statement 1 of the tangibles dimension. This means that the UK universities pay great attention to the support service delivery in order to cater for their increasing international student base.

4.4.2 Description of dimension 2: Reliability

The following four statements were considered to assess the reliability dimension.

Reliability	
Q.4	Delivers services on time
Q.5	Ability to solve students complaints on time
Q.8	Experience level of faculty

Figure 9: Reliability statements



The gap score of question 4 is 0.11 (negative) as shown above in table 4. This is the lowest gap score of the reliability dimension and it denotes that the expectations of international students are higher than their actual experience regarding on time delivery of services at the UK universities. The students are not getting services on time as they imagined which means that the universities have not met the international students' expectations. This might have been because of shortage of staffs at the universities or poor customer service skills. Therefore, this indicates that international students are dissatisfied regarding question 4. Further investigation needs to be carried out, as we know that this question 4 is very imperative to universities in order to improve international students' satisfaction.

As shown in table 4, question 5 gap score is 0.76 (negative). The gap score indicates that the UK universities have not met the expectations of international students regarding solving students' complaints on time. Though, this is one of the most important attributes that need to be discussed. The difference between the expectations and experience resulted in a drawback of the university and has led to dissatisfaction. Based on the survey result, we can say the staffs at the universities lack the speed in solving students' complaints.

From table 4 above, question 8 gap score is 0.22 (negative). The comparison between international students' expectations and experience has resulted in dissatisfaction. Although, this can be interpreted that the UK universities have failed to meet the expectations of international students regarding the experience level of the faculty. Presently, the universities under study can boast of well-experienced faculty but there is still a gap that needs to be closed on in order to improve international students' experience at the UK universities.

Question 11 gap score is 3.85 (negative). This gap score is significantly higher than other statements of the reliability dimensions. As shown on the graph, international students' expectation is higher on guest lectures arrangement for industry specialists as compared to their actual reality of services delivered at the UK universities. Based on the survey results, international students experienced lower service quality as regarding question 11 that means that the universities have not met the expectations of international students and have led to dissatisfaction in the quality of service delivered across the country. Therefore, it would be of advantage to the universities under study if more programs can be put in place this coming student year to increase international students' experience regarding industry specialist guest lectures.

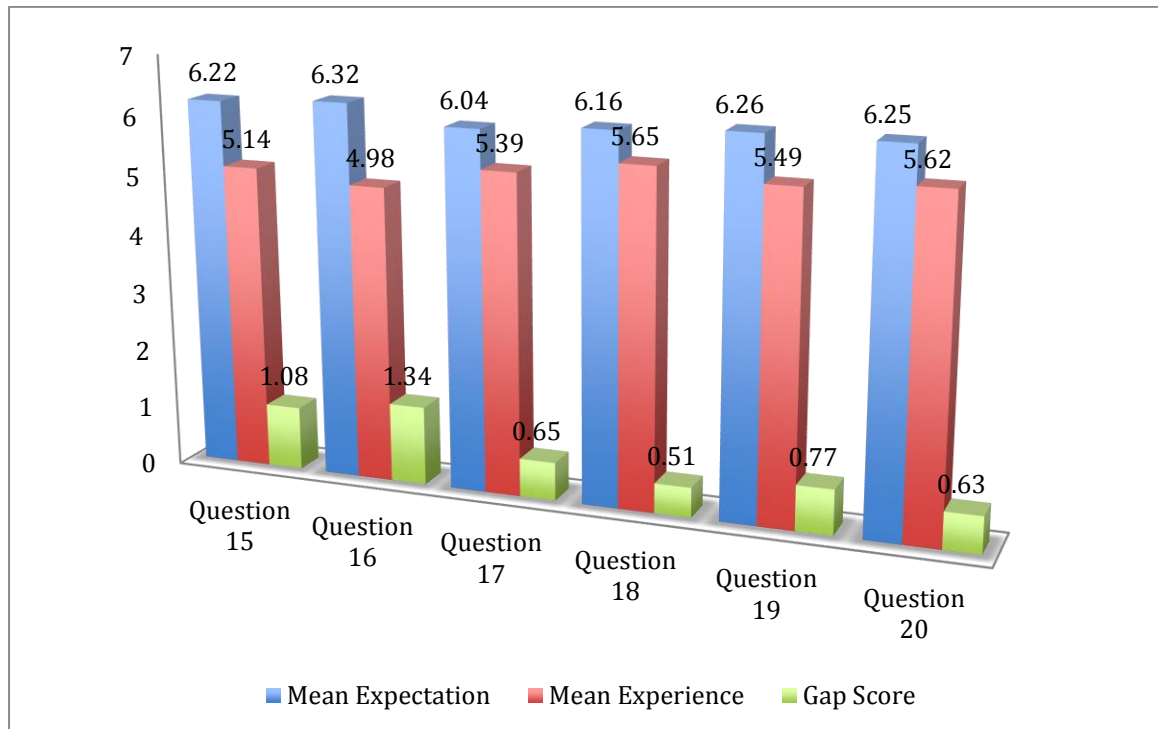
4.4.3 Description of dimension 3: Responsiveness

The following four statements were considered to assess the responsiveness dimension.

Responsiveness	
Q.15	Staff support during proposal development
Q.16	Design of course curriculum
Q.17	Faculty course work encourages teamwork and communication skills
Q.18	Courses contain basic knowledge and skills

Q.19	Usage of industry/managerial case studies
Q.20	Faculty support on management research

Figure 10: Responsiveness statements



The gap score of question 15 is 1.08 (negative). This indicates that the universities under study have not met the expectations of international students based on the graph. This is the second highest gap score of the responsiveness statement which showed how important international students cherish staffs support during proposal development. Although, the staffs at the university are providing supports to students regarding proposal development but as we can see from the survey results, the comparison between international students' expectations and experience about statement 15 has led to dissatisfaction in the quality of service at the UK universities.

As shown in table 4, question 16 gap score is 1.34 (negative). This is the highest gap score of the responsiveness dimension and it indicates that the UK universities have not met the expectations of international students regarding the design of course curriculum. Although, this is one of the most essential attributes that need to be discussed as this is imperative to both the universities and the students. The difference

between the expectations and experience resulted in weakness of the universities and has led to dissatisfaction of international students. Based on the survey result, the staffs at the universities need to review the courses curriculum design and try to see what changes are needed in order to meet international students' expectations.

From table 4 above, question 17 gap score is 0.65 (negative). The comparison between international students' expectations and experience has resulted in dissatisfaction. Although, this can be seen that the UK universities have failed to meet the expectations of international students regarding the score for delivering team working and project skills during their programme. Presently, universities supports students on how to develop team working skills and project management skills during the course but there is still a gap that needs to be closed on in order to improve international students experience at the UK universities.

As shown in table 4, question 18 gap score is 0.51 (negative). The gap score is the lowest gap score as compared to other statements of the responsiveness statement and it indicates that the universities have not met the expectations of international students regarding the courses basic skills and knowledge. Though, this is one of the most essential attributes that need to be discussed. The difference between the expectations and experience resulted in weakness of the universities under study and has led to dissatisfaction of international students. Based on the survey result, the universities staffs need to review the courses and try to understand international students' expectations regarding this question (18).

Question 19 gap score is 0.77 (negative). This gap score is not as significant when compared to other scores. As shown on the graph, international students' expectation is higher on use of managerial/industry case studies as compared to their actual reality of services delivered at the UK universities. Based on the survey results, international students experienced lower service quality as regarding question 11 that means that the universities under study have not met the expectations of international students and have led to dissatisfaction in the quality of service delivered at the universities. Though, the universities incorporate the use of industry and managerial case studies in its programmes but yet have not met the international students' expectations. More research needs to be done to look into this.

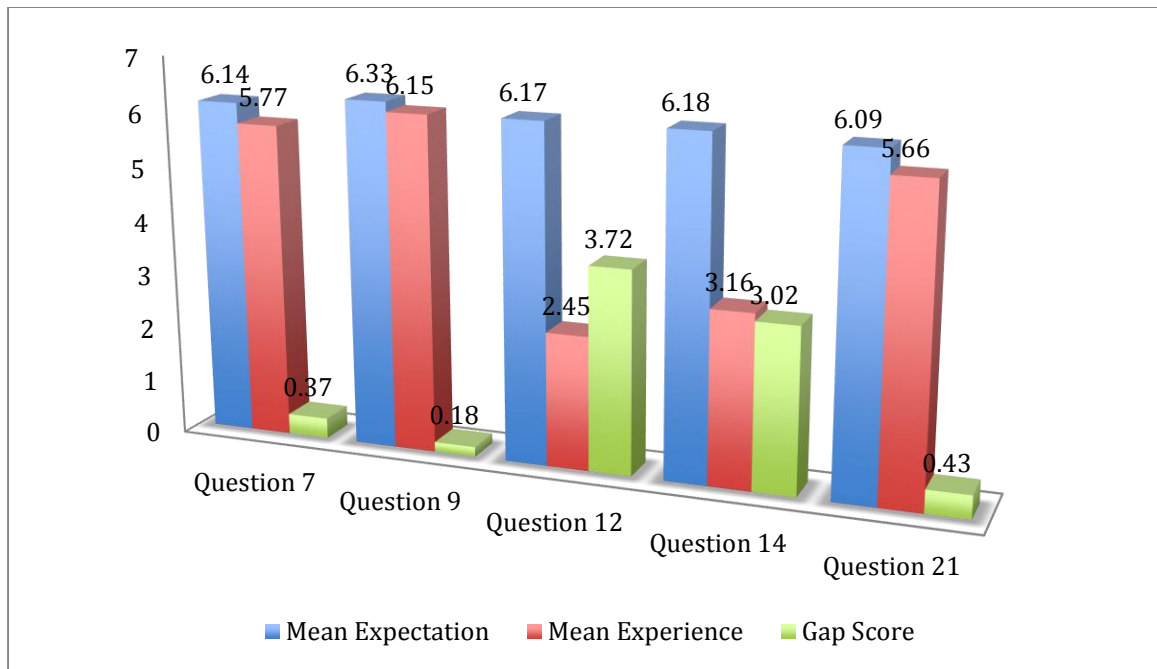
From table 4 above, question 20 gap score is 0.63 (negative). The comparison between international students' expectations and experience has resulted in dissatisfaction. It can be seen that the universities have failed to meet the expectations of international students regarding faculty support on management research. Presently, some universities supports students on both their research proposal development and during the management research but there is still a gap that needs to be closed on in order to improve international students experience at the UK universities.

4.4.4 Description of dimension 4: Assurance

The following seven statements were considered to assess the responsiveness dimension.

Assurance	
Q.7	Sufficient faculty/support staffs
Q.9	Faculty staff theoretical knowledge and adequate qualification
Q.12	Students industrial visits/trips
Q.14	Work on real life industrial/work shadowing
Q.21	Learning opportunity during management research

Figure 11: Assurance statements



As shown in table 4, question 7 gap score is 0.37 (negative). The gap score indicates that the universities have not met the expectations of international students regarding the number of support staffs. Though, this is one of the most essential attributes that need to be addressed by the universities. The difference between the expectations and experience resulted in a disadvantage of the universities service delivery and has led to dissatisfaction of international students. Based on the survey result, the staffs at the universities need to review the way they support student and try to understand international students' expectations regarding this question (7).

The gap score of question 9 is 0.18 (negative). The gap score indicates that the universities under study have not met the expectations of international students regarding the faculty staff theoretical knowledge and adequate qualification. The survey results show a gap that means that international students are interested in having qualified theoretical knowledge faculties in order to instil confidence in them about the course but the universities has failed to meet the students' expectations. The universities need to devise a way to checkmate the theoretical knowledge and the qualification of the faculties at the universities in order to improve international students' experience.

Question 12 gap score is 3.72 (negative). This gap score is higher than other statements of the assurance dimension. As shown on the graph, international students' expectation

is higher on students' industrial visits/trips as compared to their actual reality of services delivered at the universities in UK. Based on the survey results, international students experienced lower service quality as regarding question 12 that means that the UK universities have not met the expectations of international students and has led to dissatisfaction in the quality of service delivered at the universities. Some of the international students are more concerned on why international trips/local industry visits are not incorporated in some universities program, while some schools within the country have been able to achieve this at the same amount charged by other universities. More research needs to be carried out to look into what is hindering some universities from adding Q. 12 to their programme.

The gap score of question 14 is 3.02 (negative). The gap score indicates that the UK universities have not met the expectations of international students regarding working on real life industrial/business projects. The survey results show a major gap that means that international students are fascinated by practical industrial and business projects that will enhance their skills as an individual but the university has failed to meet the students' expectations. The universities need to look into how to incorporate real life industrial/business projects in their programme in order to improve international students' experience.

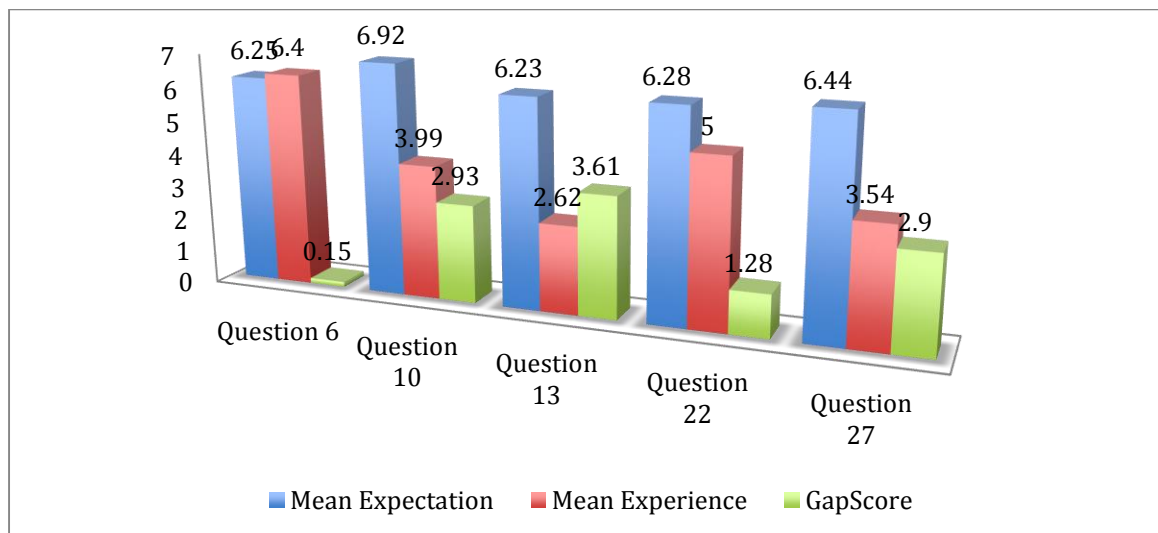
From table 4 above, question 21 gap score is 0.43 (negative). The comparison between international students' expectations and experience has resulted in dissatisfaction. Although, this can be seen as the universities have failed to meet the expectations of international students regarding their learning opportunity during management research. Presently, some of the universities under study supports students on how to develop their learning opportunities during management research by providing management research classes which introduces students on how to search and use literatures, research development and assigned supervisor to assist students during the management research. Despite the supports, there is still a gap that needs to be closed on in order to improve international students experience at the UK universities.

4.4.5 Description of dimension 5: Empathy

The following three statements were considered to assess the empathy dimension.

Empathy	
Q.6	Honest interest in solving students' problems
Q.10	Refresher course to welcome new students with less experience on the programme
Q.13	On the job training/work shadowing
Q.22	Teaching of entrepreneurial spirit by instruction and repetition
Q.27	Academic value addition

Figure 12: Empathy statements



From question 6, the mean students' expectations is 6.25 while the mean experience is 6.40. Therefore, there is a gap score of 0.15 (positive). The gap score denotes that the universities have met the expectations of international students. Although, the gap score is positive, it does not show a significant difference to specify whether the UK universities have exceeded in meeting the expectations of international students. Yet, it does demonstrate that the universities have shown honest interest in solving students' problems as an effort to achieve international students' satisfaction.

The gap score of question 10 is 2.93 (negative) as shown above in table 4. This denotes that the expectations of international students are higher than their actual experience

regarding the knowledge and qualification of faculty at the universities. The score means that the universities have not met the international students' expectations. Therefore, it can be seen that international students are dissatisfied regarding the question 10.

For question 13, the difference between mean score of expectation and mean score of experience is 3.61 (negative). This is the highest gap score of the empathy dimension. The gap score indicates that the expectation of service quality is higher than the reality of service quality. The students enjoy on job training/ work shadowing as part of their programme as this will help them have hands on experience about the course they are studying but the UK universities have failed to meet up these expectations and have resulted in dissatisfaction.

From table 4 above, question 22 gap score is 1.28 (negative). The comparison between international students' expectations and experience has resulted in dissatisfaction. Although, this can be seen as the universities have failed to meet the expectations of international students regarding the teaching of entrepreneurial spirit by instruction and repetition. Presently, universities supports students on how to develop their entrepreneurial skills by putting forward so many entrepreneurial challenges and the career and employability efforts in arranging entrepreneurial courses that comes with a certificate, work shadowing and also internship opportunities on the career website to improve international students experience in this area but there is still a gap that needs to be closed on in order to improve international students experience at the UK universities.

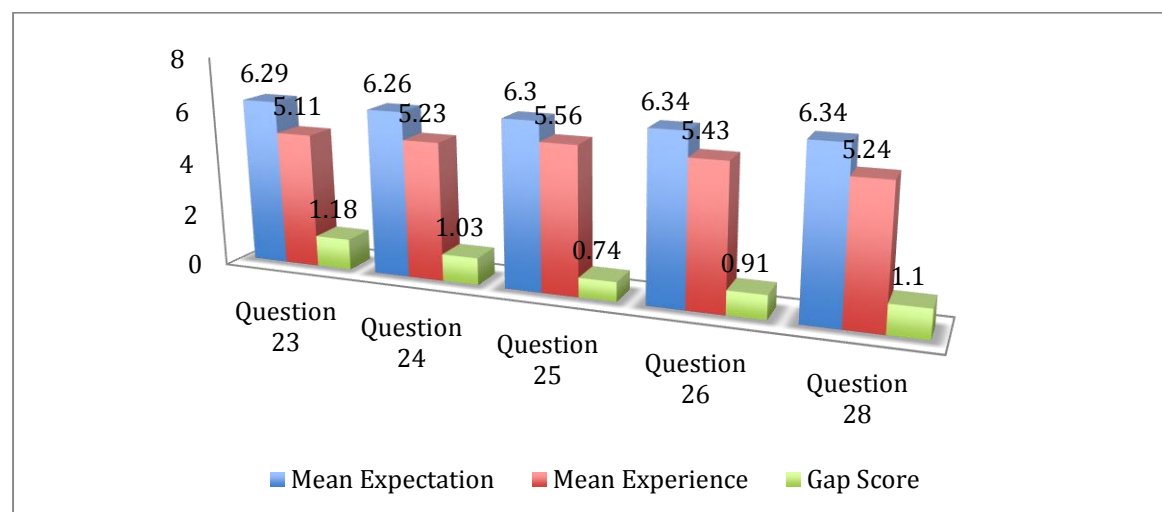
For question 27, the difference between mean score of expectation and mean score of experience is 2.90 (negative). The gap score indicates that the expectation of service quality (academic value addition) is higher than the reality of service quality. The international students wants to be able to feel the change in themselves after the course completion and also to the able to justify the reason for leaving their home country to study abroad as this will further boost their confidence and enhance their chances in the job market and also in their country of residence but the universities have failed to meet up the international students expectations and have resulted in dissatisfaction.

4.4.6 Description of dimension 6: Employability

The following seven statements were considered to assess the employability dimension.

Employability	
Q.23	Entrepreneurial spirit level after course completion
Q.24	Entrepreneurial demonstration level of managerial skill
Q.25	Employability enhancement after course completion
Q.26	Employment confidence after course completion
Q.28	Dividend on Investment

Figure 13: Employability statements



As shown in table 4, question 23 gap score is 1.18 (negative). The gap score indicates that the universities in UK have not met the expectations of international students regarding students' entrepreneurial spirit level after course completion. Though, this is one of the most essential attributes to business students and it needs to be discussed. The difference between the expectations and experience resulted in weakness of the universities and has led to dissatisfaction of international students. Based on the survey result, the staffs at the university need to review the courses by introducing more modules to look into entrepreneurship as a whole module and also, local visits can

change the experience of students. UK universities should try to understand international students' expectations regarding question 23, which will in turn change international students' experience.

The gap score of question 24 is 1.03 (negative). The gap score indicates that the universities have not met the expectations of international students regarding entrepreneurial demonstration level of managerial skill. The survey results show a gap that means that international students are fascinated by a range of managerial skills presentation that will enhance their management skills as an individual and which can affect their decisions positively during job hunting or during setting up a business but the universities have failed to meet the students' expectations. The UK universities under study need to look into what the students' expectations are in this area and see how they can meet their expectations.

For question 25, the difference between the mean score of expectation and the mean score of experience is 0.74 (negative). This is the lowest gap score of the employability dimension. The gap score indicates that the expectation of service quality is higher than the reality of service quality. The students want to feel confident on completion of their course to face any employer and also, be able to match up the job industry requirements. Though, this resulted in international students' dissatisfaction but the universities can look into how they can improve on the courses delivered at the campus and try to understand how they can meet the international students' expectations regarding this question.

The gap score of question 26 is 0.91 (negative) as shown above in table 4. This denotes that the expectations of international students are higher than their actual experience regarding employment confidence after course completion. The score means that the universities have not met the international students' expectations. Therefore, it can be seen that international students are dissatisfied regarding the question 10.

Question 28 gap score is 1.10 (negative). As shown on the graph, international students' expectation is slightly higher on dividend on investment as compared to their actual reality. Based on the survey results, international students are not fully convince the universities have met their expectations and also, with the word of mouth shared among

friends and family about the quality of education abroad as compared to what is delivered in their home country, the difference is not that glaring. This has led to dissatisfaction. Therefore, it would be of advantage to the universities if more programs can be put in place that would tackle this issue and further increase the international students experience regarding their view on dividend on investment.

Finally, table 5 demonstrates a gap score for the six dimensions that are: tangibility (0.25), reliability (1.23), responsiveness (0.83), assurance (1.54), empathy (2.11) and employability (1.00). All the gap scores are negative as shown on the summary table and this indicates that the university has not met the expectations of international students on the adapted 6 service quality dimensions. Although, the universities on a daily basis are improving on their service delivery in order to meet the international students expectations but still, the international students expectation are high. The highest gaps are recorded in empathy (2.11), assurance (1.54), reliability (1.23), and followed by employability (1.00).

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the findings of the study. This chapter discusses in-depth the results and findings in respect to the objectives of the study. Further recommendations for future studies are also made.

5.1 Critical Evaluation of Methodology

The researcher has been able to collect the experience of service quality of the four universities through a quantitative research method and also has adopted a positivist research philosophy with a deductive approach. The adapted SERVQUAL model has been used to measure the best performing and most essential features for the analysis of the statements. Through the questionnaires received, the gaps between the international students' expectations and experience of the universities were examined. Quantitative method was adopted in this study after a careful evaluation of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Finally, the methodology adopted in the research was appropriate to find answers to the research questions in chapter one.

5.2 Primary Data

This research is based on primary data and for the motive of examining expectations and experience of service quality of international students at the universities under study; survey questionnaire method was adopted to collect data. The survey questionnaire used was adapted from Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985, 1988) SERVQUAL instrument. From the 22 statements and five dimensions, the attributes were adapted to six dimensions and 28 statements for the purpose of this research namely: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and employability. The questionnaire used is divided into 3 sections: section 1 - student details, section 2 – contains 28 service quality statements which were used to identify the experience and expectations of international students and section 3 – contains three open ended questions for the participants' comments and suggestions.

5.3 Conceptual Model

SERVQUAL model has been utilised in this research to evaluate the service quality. The model consists of five original dimensions. SERVQUAL has been broadly studied and has gained acceptance with specialists in many industries, ranging from healthcare and hotels to banking, higher education and e-business (Tanghe, 2012). Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985, 1988) demonstrated five dimensions of service quality, which is abbreviated as “RATER factor” and it means reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. A considerable number of other researchers have sought to verify the result of SERVQUAL, and though some have succeeded to approve a five-factor pattern, a number of researchers have failed (Getty and Getty, 2003; Khan, 2003; Markovic, 2006; Yoon and Suh, 2004).

According to (Angell et al., 2008; Harris, 2002; Wolverton, 1995; Yang, 2008), there is an extensive form of suggestions in higher education literature proposing that the SERVQUAL instrument is efficient in measuring service quality in the higher education environment and is especially helpful in offering guidance for changing flaws to strengths when compared to SERVPERF. In addition, universities have responded by using measurement mechanisms such as SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985, 1988) and SERVPERF (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). Based on a study for examining service quality in a cross cultural setting in higher education institutions in three countries, Lee (2007) rated the SERVQUAL instrument to be more suitable than SERVPERF.

In this research, the quality of service expectations and experience of international student is examined through SERVQUAL instrument and the gap scores between expectations and experience were calculated on the base of distinct mean test. The mean score for each SERVQUAL statement was calculated and this was achieved by subtracting experience from expectations (Experience - Expectations).

As discussed in chapter two above, the achieved level of satisfaction of international students is equal to the gap score between expectations and experience of service quality.

5.4 Summary of Study

5.4.1 The findings on the objectives

The primary objective of this research is to analyse the factors affecting international students' service quality expectations at four UK universities from the students' standpoint. It sought to find what students observed to be the most essential and best functioning features of service quality. The results of the research questions are demonstrated with conclusions based on the analysis and findings discussed in chapter four. The service quality gaps are identified through SERVQUAL adapted model and the idea of the using SERVQUAL instrument proved useful for evaluating the gaps of service quality

Objective 1: What are the expectations and experience of service quality of international students' at UK Universities?

Expectations and experience plays an important role when evaluating customers' satisfaction with the actual service they receive. Experience is considered comparative to expectations. As discussed earlier in the literature review section of this study, customers perceive services in relation to the quality of services they received and if or not they are satisfied with their actual experiences of the service. According to the findings in chapter four, all the items in the dimensions reveal negative gap scores as in most cases in the SERVQUAL statement, expectations surpasses the experience of international students at the UK universities used in this study.

Objective 2: What is the gap between expectation and actual experience of international students' about the quality of programmes delivered at UK Universities?

This research focused mainly on the examination of international students' expectations and experience of service quality and has considered service quality as an extent of how the delivered services gap equals customers' expectations. The idea of assessing the difference between expectations and experience using an adapted SERVQUAL model proved useful for evaluating the gaps of service quality in this study. Chapter four reported the findings and the results demonstrated that, in each of the six adapted SERVQUAL dimensions, there were negative gap scores in the overall service quality

dimensions. Empathy dimension indicated the highest gap, followed by assurance, reliability and employability dimensions. The tangibility and responsiveness gap scores are low as compared to the other dimensions.

Objective 3: How can this study provide recommendations for future development in order to attract and increase the satisfaction of international students' at the UK universities?

According to the findings in chapter four, international students' experience of the services received from the UK universities is lower compared to their expectation. Therefore, judging from the gap scores in table five, all the six dimensions turn out negative. Although, some of the statements are positive but international students' expectations are higher. This will serve as a reminder to the staff and management of the universities as most universities in the UK focus on offering world-class quality services at all times. A positive gap score indicates (satisfaction) that means the experience level is higher than that of the expectation and a negative gap score indicates (dissatisfaction) that means the experience level is lower when compared to that of expectation. Chapter four presented and explained that the mean scores for expectations in most statements surpassed the mean scores of experience in relation to the six service quality dimensions used in this study. Therefore, improvements are needed across all the dimensions in order to effect change in the way students perceive service quality at the respective university.

5.4.2 The findings on the six SERVQUAL dimensions

With reference to the survey results, questions 1 (use of modern equipment) and 3 (The support services like library, computer etc.) showed a positive gap score in the **tangibles** dimension. Accordingly, International students responded positively about the availability and accessibility of support staff and also, for good signage and effective use of modern technology. The findings imply that the universities management has met and surpassed the expectations of international students, as most physical facilities were modern looking equipment. The universities have also used the signage and communication systems effectively, which has contributed to the positive gap scores, as students know where to get help easily. Although, the overall gap score (0.25) was affected by the gap score for question 2 that is: the physical facilities at the

faculty are not visually appealing and have resulted in international students' dissatisfaction. However, this finding is consistent with the findings carried out by (Harvey 2001 as cited in Arambewela and Hall, 2009), most postgraduate courses require the constant use of computers and the presence of modern and adequate computer facilities increases the attractiveness of universities among students. International students expect reasonably modern computer equipment, with adequate quantities to be made available for students use in order to meet their academic needs. This variable is considered important in the realisation of student satisfaction.

The **reliability** dimension as explained in chapter 2 refers to the universities ability to deliver the promised service in a complete and reliable manner. Reliability is one of the most important service dimensions from a student standpoint. All the statements of the reliability dimension gap scores are negative. International students expectations are significantly high (6.23) as compared to experience (5.00). This implies that international students are not satisfied with the service dimension. Although, International students are dissatisfied as the universities ability to solve students complaints came out poor, services were not delivered on time based on the students expectations and experience scores, experience level of faculty were not up to the expectations of international students and the highest gap score of the reliability dimension is lack of industry expert lectures organised by the faculties. The overall gap score is negative which indicates dissatisfaction of international students. According to Kohut (1997 as cited in Arambewela and Hall, 2009), Many international students believe interaction with other foreign students, university lecturers and administrators as part of their learning experience and the nature of the counselling, orientation programs and other social activities and timing are considered very important. This is evident in relation to social and cultural support literatures on the adjustment of difficulties and academic stress of international students and the need for adequate support to minimise the “cultural shock” (Dunn, 2001 as cited in Arambewela and Hall, 2009). It is essential for service providers to know what their customers want in order to be able to deliver service encounter that would satisfy them (Winsted, 2000 as cited in Rajkhowa and Raghav, 2013). Therefore, the universities management needs to see how they can invite external guest speakers and organise learning events during the course, as this is one of the biggest gap of the SERVQUAL dimension.

Responsiveness dimension can be seen as the readiness to support customers 24/7 and also to provide quick service continuously. Occasionally, this service we are referring to may be out of operating hours. The mean expectation score for this dimension is (6.21) and that of experience is (5.38) as shown in chapter four. Table five shows the summary gap score of the dimension and it is (0.83). The test score indicates that international students have high expectations regarding staff support during proposal development, design of course curriculum, encouragement of teamwork and communication skills, courses contain basic knowledge and skill and faculty support on management research. Though, based on the result in table four and five, the expectations of international students are not met and have resulted in dissatisfaction of the responsiveness dimension. This finding is related to the previous study of (Davies, 2007 as cited in Arambewela and Hall, 2009), given the student diversity, universities will need to adapt teaching methods to include non-traditional teaching techniques to satisfy the specific educational demands of international students. The universities under study should lay emphasis on attentiveness and improve on their willingness in dealing with students request, doubts and timely complaint resolution.

As explained earlier in chapter two, **assurance** dimension refers to the experience and politeness of staff and their faculty to instil trust and confidence together with the effectiveness of their service. This dimension is considered as very important as compared to other dimensions. The mean expectation score is (6.18) while that of experience is (4.64). The assurance gap score is (1.54) and it indicates that international students are not satisfied with the universities service. The two higher gap score is as a regard of students study trips/ visits and working on real life projects. The universities need to train staff to improve on cross cultural knowledge and skills in order to meet international students' expectations. Also, the universities need to have experienced people who encourage trust of customers in the organisation. This study conforms with what has been depicted by (Soutar and McNiel, 2003 as cited in Hasan, Lias, Rahman and Razak, 2009) in their research, stating that assurance is one of the dimensions that are significantly related with satisfaction denoting that students in higher institution are actually concern with the knowledge, courtesy and ability to inspire trust and confidence.

Empathy dimension is related to understanding and concern of student's needs. Also, it signifies the level of the university's exact knowledge and care. The mean expectation score is (6.42) and that of experience is (4.31). The gap is (2.11). The high gap score is as a result of the following questions: solving students' problems, on job training and work shadowing, introductory course for new student, academic value addition and teaching on entrepreneurship. This denotes that the universities have failed to show care and understanding towards the needs of international students that leads to dissatisfaction. Although, the strongest support for this finding is actually from (Maushart, 2003 as cited in Hasan, Lias, Rahman and Razak, 2009) as he found that when student show a high satisfaction with their college experience, it is ascribed to the formal and informal contact with their lecturer. Contact with the lecturers seems to play an important role because according to Clewes (2003) the activity of teaching and learning is actually the vital part to students' evaluation of service quality. It could have an effect toward students' evaluation on satisfaction.

Employability dimension, which is the adapted dimension to the original SERVQUAL dimensions, means the ability of the university to equip the students with the right skills and exposure to meet the job industry requirement. The mean expectation score is (6.31) and the experience mean score is (5.31). The gap score is (1.00). The mean test score indicates that international students' expectations are high on the following questions: entrepreneurial spirit level after course completion, entrepreneurial demonstration level of managerial skills, employability enhancement after course completion, employment confidence after course completion and dividend on investment. Though, the universities provides support to international students through their career website and offer crash courses that can boost students entrepreneurial skills but still, the expectations of international students are not met and has resulted in dissatisfaction. This finding is in line with the statement of (Burke, 1986 as cited in Arambewela and Hall, 2009) found that the lack of opportunities for part-time casual employment is a concern to many students. This also appears to be a concern among the postgraduate students. Most of the postgraduate students have been in one job or the other in their home countries and so, expect to find a part-time/casual job in the area of interest in which they are professionally qualified. The negative experience resulting from the failure to secure such casual positions influences on the overall satisfaction of students.

5.5 Recommendations

This research is important not only to the universities at large but also to the higher education sector overall in order to ensure that institutions can apply correct set of processes to always review and improve their customer service quality. From the survey results in chapter four, the gaps between expectations and experience indicate that there is a need for service improvement across the university services. Based on the overall gap scores, the following recommendations are therefore suggested:

- The university management must understand the expectations of students and learn to prioritise resources when buying new equipment so that the equipment can be well maintained and visually appealing to the students;
- The university staff must be trained in service quality programmes e.g. Customer Service Improvement courses, Organisational Behavioural courses, Communication Coaching and Anger Management courses;
- The university staff should maintain a student oriented culture which is grounded in service quality and create awareness, support and enablement among other university staffs;
- Appropriate feedback method should be maintained in the university in order to aid timely response to solve students' issues and also to meet deadlines promised to prospective students;
- Technology and systems play a key role in every university settings; managements should ensure appropriate update and changes to systems and technologies so that they could support the execution of quality specifications and
- The university management should maintain role clarity among staff in order to manage tasks effectively so that interference in service quality can be reduced to a minimum.

5.6 Limitations

As with any research, this study contributes to new knowledge regarding the expectations and experience of service quality in four UK universities. This study has been subject to several limitations that might have obstructed its accuracy. These limitations must be considered while interpreting the research results.

This research only considered a small sample of four UK universities. In addition, the sample was based on a specific level of study (Postgraduate international students). Hence, it is valued that the discussion is based around a limited sample and it would not be proper to generalise the results of the study to all UK universities. Concurrently, it is vital to not underestimate the impact of the findings. Rather, the results present a solid paradigm for service quality, providing helpful insights that are definite to the universities, which the university service management could reflect on when addressing service quality issues.

In retrospect, if the researcher had more time and resources, a larger sample (e.g. more universities, additional dimensions) would have been considered and in addition a more detailed examination into the connection between different service qualities dimensions. This might give better understanding and yield results that can be more generalisable.

5.7 Recommendations for Future Study

This research only looked at four UK universities with focus on postgraduate level of study. Future research can be undertaken among different UK universities with focus across different levels of study. Additionally, future research might also look at whether international students expectations and experience level differs from that of local students. Also, a few more quality dimensions should be introduced in measuring service quality e.g. post-study, library resources, campus facilities etc. Finally, different measuring tool such as SERVPERF or HERDPERF can be considered in measuring the service quality in higher education institutions.

5.8 Conclusion

This research has highlighted the expectations and experience of international students at four UK universities. Issues relating to the delivery of service quality and the gap

scores were discussed from the angle of both academic and non-academic aspects represented by six dimensions in the study which are: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and employability. The conceptual model used is SERVQUAL model. Service quality is imperative in higher education institutions in order to achieve a competitive advantage. In today's unpredictable economy, excellent service delivery can be the winning factor in any organisations success.

The research finding reveals that the universities studied on all the six dimensions of service quality do not meet the expectations of international students. All the dimensions are negative based on the mean gap score in table 4. Although some of the statements are positive but the high gap scores in other statements affected the overall gap scores. The recommendations and conclusions reviewed in this chapter signify some of the procedures that might possibly be taken by UK universities to improve the delivery of service quality. This research will have a positive influence on the delivery of service quality which will further help the universities to increase international students' satisfaction and increase students' retention. Lastly, by finding the service quality strengths and weaknesses, the universities can assign and use their resources more effectively in order to improve the experience of international students.

MANAGEMENT RESEARCH PROJECT

REFLECTION

One of the main module of the MBA degree as a whole is the completion of the management research project. The module involved undertaking a management research project to produce a 12,000-word document. The management research project was titled “*A Study of the Expectation Vs Experience of International Students at UK Universities*”. The literature-based module uses a selection of sources comprising; Textbooks, journals, online articles and government documents. This research aimed to examine the international students’ expectations and experience of service quality at UK universities. This research utilised theoretical perspectives and the SERVQUAL instrument to assess the quality of services delivered at the universities. Also, there was a focus on students’ expectations, students’ experience, service quality, SERVQUAL - its strengths and weaknesses and the suitability of the instrument for this research. The research also provide recommendations for universities and higher education sector on how to meet the needs and expectations of students in order to improve students’ satisfaction.

In view of the difficulty and duration of this study, time management was taken seriously. Starting the management research project was slow, due to doubts about the subject and the need to reduce the robustness of the topic. However, as the project took form, a scheduled plan of work laid down in the research proposal was followed strictly to ensure that the work was completed on time in order to meet the submission deadline. Some of the task took too long as expected which affected the plan of work proposed earlier. Another problem faced while completing this work was adhering to the word count.

Though the structure of the current postgraduate programme at University of Chester is quite effective but I feel it can be improved in two areas. Firstly, researchers could be given the opportunity to participate in consultancy-based projects where they will contribute their skills learnt in the course and as well learn the core of business. This would be more beneficial to international students studying in UK as the opportunity

will give them an idea of how UK companies operate. This will give the students a broader perspective and also enhance their employment chances home and abroad. Secondly, I feel that MBA students could be given the option to take an oral examination in order to defend their management research project. A verbal defence can benefit both the students and the examiners as it gives students an opportunity to answer queries about their management research and defend their findings. In addition, it will enhance students' presentation skills while the option will give examiners a new insight into the reliability of the researcher and their research project.

My management research project experience taught me discipline, perseverance and time management since I had to self-motivate myself to complete my dissertation, edit it and review it for submission. The research module has improved my critical thinking abilities and made me a self-reliant learner. My postgraduate experience was really improved by my supervisor who patiently led me through every stage of my research. He managed successfully to retain the complex balance between the time and space needed to do my research and writing, and monitor my improvement from time to time.

Lastly, according to Ken Robinson, *“If you’re not prepared to be wrong, you’ll never come up with anything original.”* – This experience is an accomplishment and a great experience that I will always remember with honour and contentment.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire to Study the Expectations vs Experience of International Students at UK Universities.

Dear Respondent,

I am Temitope Adelekan, a full time Masters of Business Administration student of University of Chester, Chester, UK. I am currently undertaking a management research project towards an MBA degree at the Chester Business School, University of Chester. Your valued input will be highly beneficial to my study. (*All information received is highly confidential and will be used for analysis purposes only*).

The purpose of this survey is to examine the international students' expectations vs experience of service quality in UK higher education sector.

Please respond as honestly as possible as the information obtained from this survey will help to improve the service of the university to you.

Thank you for your participation.

Yours faithfully,

Temitope Adelekan

This questionnaire is designed to elicit your responses about your expectations and experience at the University of *****.

The Survey The questionnaire below is in three sections.

Section A: *Student Information*

For Q1 and 2, please indicate by marking [x]
Undergraduate ☐ Post-graduate ☐
Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐
Nationality [please state]

Section B: Your Expectation vs Experience at the University of *****

Expectations

This section of the survey deals with your opinion of the University. Please show the extent to which you think universities should possess the following features. What we are interested in here is a number that best show your expectations vs experience at the university.

You should rank each statement as follows:

**Least
Important**

**Most
Important**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

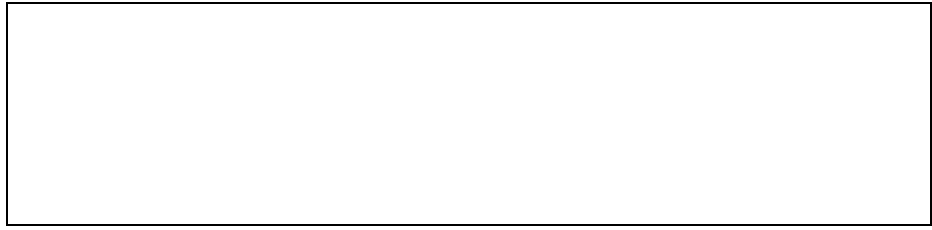
Statement	Your Expectation	Your Experience
1. Use of modern looking equipment.		
2. The physical facilities at the faculty are visually appealing.		
3. The Support services like library, computers etc.		
4. Delivers services on time.		
5. Ability to solve student's complaints on time.		
6. Honest interest in solving your problems.		
7. Sufficient faculty/support staffs.		
8. Experience level of faculty.		
9. Faculty staff theoretical knowledge and adequate qualification.		
10. Refresher course to welcome new students with less experience on the programme.		
11. Industry expert lectures organised by the faculty.		
12. Management student's industrial visits/trips.		
13. On the job training / Work Shadowing.		

Statement	Your Expectation	Your Experience
14. Work on real life industrial projects.		
15. Staff support during proposal development.		
16. Design of course curriculum.		
17. Faculty course work encourages teamwork & communication skills.		
18. Courses contain basic knowledge & Skill.		
19. Usage of industry/managerial case studies.		
20. Faculty support on management research.		
21. Learning opportunity during management research.		
22. Teaching of entrepreneurial spirit by instruction and repetition.		
23. Entrepreneurial spirit level after course completion.		
24. Entrepreneurial demonstration level of managerial skill.		
25. Employability enhancement after course completion.		
26. Employment confidence after course completion.		
27. Academic value addition.		
28. Dividend on Investment.		

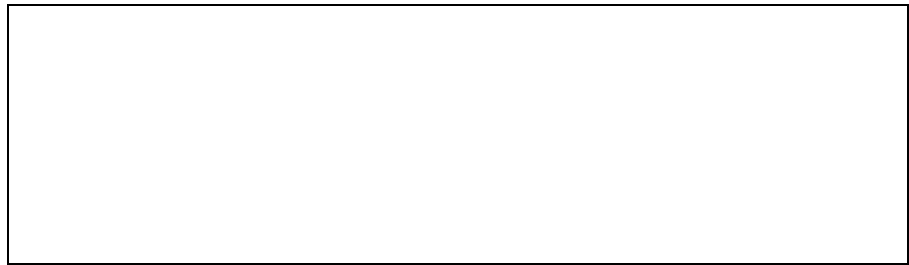
Section C: Additional Comments

- Are there any services you would like the University to provide which are currently not being provided? If yes, please list them below.

- Are there any services that the University currently offers, but we have not highlighted in the preceding questions? If yes, list them below.



3. Are there any other comment you would like to provide?



Thank you for your valuable time and feedback.